

János Berecz

1956
Counter-Revolution
in Hungary

– Words and Weapons –



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Preface

The present volume remains exceptionally timely, despite the passage of time since its first edition in 1969. Memories of the counter-revolution of 1956 in Hungary are kept alive all over the world for widely varying reasons.

It is the intention of the class forces hostile to socialism to use every means in their power everywhere to discredit socialist society and to limit or diminish the influence of revolutionary ideals. According to their interpretation, the Hungarian counter-revolution of 1956 showed clearly that the Hungarian people had not supported socialism regarding it as an alien phenomenon.

The Hungarian Communists as well as the revolutionary movements beyond the country's borders consider the history of socialism in Hungary between 1953 and 1957 as an important source of historical experience. They think that the lessons of the period must be remembered. Communists believe that conclusions can still be drawn from the events themselves and their underlying causes. It is equally important that these conclusions should be passed on to the coming generations of a constantly renewing society in order to help them avoid errors and avert new tragedies. This is at least as important as the need to recognize the new demands of new periods.

Almost three decades have passed since the events and the crushing of the 1956 counter-revolution in Hungary. This anniversary offers an opportunity to review history. Our class enemies continue to play the same old tune, but to a rather new instrumentation. While extolling the counter-

revolutionary actions, they have to admit the fact that the past thirty years in Hungary represent a period of steady progress. However, the emigré reactionaries who lament their wrecked hopes, continue to pursue a blindly incorrigible approach, deploring the passing of the ultimate opportunity for a take-over in Hungary. Some who played an important role in those days are overwhelmed by nostalgia and nurse fresh hopes. They are certain to suffer new disappointments, for they have broken away from Hungarian reality and the actual power relations.

Social tensions and conflicts occurring in the socialist countries often recall the Hungarian experience. Events in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and those that have been going on in Poland since July 1980 have caused attention to be focussed repeatedly on Hungary. When placed in this way under the magnifying glass of contemporary analysis the lessons drawn from the events of 1956 in Hungary are shown to be increasingly timely. It is especially important to emphasize the significance of political struggle on two fronts, and the need to stand firm.

Eventful and rich in experiences though the intervening years have been since the first publication of this book in 1969, we do not feel it necessary to subject it to extensive revision. However, as time has marched on, an increasing number of documents have become available and have been used to clarify at some points and to provide greater accuracy at others. I considered it very important to give a more detailed picture of the circumstances in which the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government was formed and took the initial steps towards socialist consolidation. It is also important to discuss the lasting lessons which arise from these circumstances. Therefore, a new chapter has been added to this second edition under the title "The Foundations of Socialist Consolidation".

János Berecz

Chapter 1

Hungary and the International Situation before 1956

In our age, in the mutual relationships of nations, the possibility for influencing other nations has vastly expanded. The simultaneous existence of socialism and capitalism in the two opposing world systems has brought about an expansion and intensification of the international class struggle. Today important issues concerning the future of mankind are being settled in the arena of international class struggle. The nations (especially the smaller ones) can no longer make themselves independent of international conflicts and the international balance of forces. The growing power and quantity of weapons exert a political influence and place a heavy responsibility on Communist and peace-loving forces with whom the future of mankind lies. All this increases the importance of the fraternal relations and co-operation among countries belonging to the socialist world system. The responsibility they bear towards one another and their unity on the most essential issues are factors providing the firm basis for their international power.

Soon after World War II, the situation of the People's Republic of Hungary was basically determined by the fact that the country started to build socialism under the leadership of the working class and became a member of the socialist world community. The establishment and subsequent strengthening of the socialist world system were the most important external factors in Hungary's development and in the creative work of the Hungarian people.

The unity of the community of socialist countries emerged in the sharp international class struggles between two oppos-

ing social systems. Simultaneously, there were sharp class struggles between the forces of progress and reaction in the new socialist countries. The imperialists helped with all means at their disposal the internal reactionary forces and they attempted to foment conflict between the countries that had chosen the path of socialism.

That struggle, the joining of forces and the united position taken by the Soviet Union and the countries of People's Democracy became an international factor creating a new type of relations between peoples based on the principles of proletarian internationalism. The unity of the socialist world system has become the international guarantee of progress, the national cause of each socialist country and the key to their peace, national independence and security.

In this process the socialist world system has become the most decisive factor of our age. By 1956 it could already be recognized that power relations were shifting in favour of socialism and there were also obvious indications that the world community of socialist countries was in the possession of fundamental and decisive economic, political and military power.

The foundations for the unity of socialist countries had been laid by bilateral and multi-lateral friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance agreements. This joining of forces made it impossible for the economic embargo imposed by the imperialist countries to achieve its objective. The economies of the socialist countries made rapid progress. In this process the international organ for economic cooperation between socialist countries, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) was also established (1949).

Close political and economic cooperation came to be supplemented with a military alliance in order to counter-balance constant war threats and attempts at intervention. In May 1955, the Warsaw Treaty Organization, a defensive alliance of the European socialist countries, was established long after the foundation of different aggressive imperialist military blocs. The Treaty contributed to an increase in the military strength of the socialist world system, and it made it possible for the People's Democracies to rely also on the

armed force of the countries affiliated to the organization in defence of their own land.

In the early 1950's the socialist forces of the world achieved substantial successes at the expense of cold war policies. Stages in a series of reverses for cold war policies were marked by the ending of the Korean war (1953), the Geneva Conference (1954), the Summit Meeting (heads of government of the big powers), the conclusion of the Austrian State Treaty (1955), and so on. As a result and in the wake of the successes scored by the national liberation movements the positions of imperialists were shaken. This gave evidence, in the first place, of the strength of and increased role played by the socialist world system.

The fact that Hungary had become a member of the socialist world system represented a substantial strengthening of the position of the People's Republic. For the first time in her history, Hungary could make progress over a long period of time as member of the group of countries that was struggling with the most progressive ideas for the prosperity and peace of all humanity. Due to her economic achievements and peace-loving policy, Hungary found the way out of isolation and achieved international reputation. As a result of this policy the Hungarian People's Republic established diplomatic relations with 41 countries and trade-relations with 91 states during the 12 years following World War II. In that period the Hungarian state and its organs became members of some 300 inter-governmental, social, economic, cultural, scientific, health, sport and other international organizations. Following eight years of struggle, the People's Republic of Hungary occupied her merited seat in United Nations in the autumn of 1955.

The fact that Hungary belonged to the socialist world system became one of the essential conditions of her economic prosperity. In spite of the fact that Hungary is poor in raw materials, she managed to establish a fairly advanced industry founded upon the Soviet Union's raw material basis. Related figures can help illustrate the point. In 1955, the share of the Soviet Union in Hungary's annual import was 28.2 per cent, the corresponding figure for exports to that

country was 32.2 per cent. The overwhelming majority of Soviet deliveries were raw materials. Of the raw materials used in Hungary in 1955, 71 per cent of the iron ore, 80 per cent of the pig iron, 30 per cent of foundry lead, 81 per cent of sulphur, 81 per cent of raw phosphate, 77 per cent of native soda, 30 per cent of synthetic rubber, 80 per cent pine timber and 55 per cent of raw cotton were imported from the Soviet Union. At the same time, machines and engineering products accounted for over 50 per cent of Hungarian deliveries to the Soviet Union, a figure corresponding to almost 20 per cent of the annual output of Hungary's engineering industry.

The development and strength of the socialist world system, the friendship and fraternal cooperation established between the peoples of the socialist countries were decisive factors of the defence of national independence, the prosperity of the Hungarian people and the increased respect enjoyed on the international scene.

Socialist development, however, was not an unbroken process free from obstacles neither in Hungary nor in other countries. To defeat the country's "own" bourgeoisie, to wage constant struggle against international imperialism with its enormous powerful material foundations and backing, and to find the best possible and most successful method for building a new world under the conditions of economic backwardness are extremely demanding tasks even in a historical perspective. Today we know only too well that the efforts made to find the right path also led to serious mistakes, unnecessary detours and sacrifices that could have been avoided in the first decade of socialist construction.

In addition to the objective difficulties, the situation was aggravated by the errors committed by leaders who based their policies on views alien to Marxism—Leninism, especially in the form of the cult of personality. The cold war imposed on the socialist countries by the imperialists and the development of defensive potential placed additional burdens on peoples already making great sacrifices in construction work. As a result, the socialist countries were unable to ensure an increase in living standards correspond-

ing to their declared and planned goals. All these factors created tension within the socialist world system as well.

The external and internal enemies tried to make use of these areas of tension for their own purposes. They did not hesitate to do harm wherever they found an opportunity to do so. In their actions a particularly important role was assigned to the armed provocation of June 17, 1953 in Berlin, organized under the cover name of "X-Day". Although that particular attempt was foiled and its organizers fell flat, they continued to busy themselves planning new actions using different tactics and methods. Their propaganda organs sought to disrupt the unity of the socialist countries and make conditions more difficult for the building of socialism in the individual countries by exerting constant psychological pressure.

The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union summarized its own experiences and those of the other socialist countries in a creative way in February 1956. The Congress revealed the very grave consequences of the personality cult and disclosed the errors originating from sectarian and dogmatic policies violating the laws of building socialism. It adopted measures designed to restore socialist legality and the Leninist norms of party life. The Congress took note of the results achieved, but it also disclosed the disturbing factors in the life of and relations between the socialist countries and pointed out the methods of eliminating them. However, the correct criticism and programme of the Twentieth Congress were not followed immediately by the necessary measures. Some Communists were confused by the new conclusions and it took some time for them to find the correct methods and the new style of leadership.

A large measure of critical examination began after the Congress in the ranks of Hungarian socialists. In this process anti-party forces also made their appearance. Taking advantage of the time necessary to translate the ideas of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union into practice, international imperialism launched an immediate and concentrated attack on law and order in the People's Republic of Hungary.

Chapter 2

The Doctrines of "Containment" and "Liberation"—Political Warfare (1947–1954)

Ever since the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution international imperialism has been guided by the fundamental objectives of strengthening the world system of capitalism and annihilating socialism. In the course of the struggle waged for the achievement of these political goals the imperialists have endeavoured to take into account at all times the development in power relations. Indicative of the constant nature of this approach was the statement made by the Radio Free Europe Commission in the Spring of 1956. "Cold war tactics may be as variable as April weather, but the basic nature, strategy and aims remain unchanged."¹ In accord with this dictum, open military intervention, economic blockade, diplomatic pressure, threats, political provocations were adopted.

After World War II, especially during the period of the establishment and strengthening of the socialist world system, the imperialists launched a broad campaign against the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies. The leading political circles of the United States of America were in the forefront of the elaboration and application of the cold war.

Guided by the American financial oligarchy's ideas of world domination, the leading organs of the United States started subversive activities directed against the socialist countries. These activities became objectives and they were

¹The complete study was published by R. T. Holt: *Radio Free Europe*. Minneapolis 1958, pp. 217–231.

raised to the level of government policy. They were central also to the alliance system of the capitalist countries.

Grayson Kirk, President of Columbia University commented on the policy of "containment" in the October 1964 issue of the American foreign policy magazine *Foreign Affairs*: "The identification of the Soviet Union as our great antagonist and the military weakness of all the states around the Soviet periphery forced us to expand the policy of containment to global proportions."

George F. Kennan, the well-known American diplomat, was the first to formulate the essence and fundamental principles of "containment" in an article attributed to "X" and carried by the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. In Kennan's opinion, the United States should continue to regard the Soviet Union as an adversary not a partner in the political arena. He proposed that the Russians be confronted with a firm counter force at the different, constantly changing geographical and political points. Economic embargo and the building of a network of military bases, for example, were regarded as elements of the counter force. Military strategy was based upon the monopoly of nuclear weapons.

The Truman doctrine was enunciated in 1947 as the political means of "containment"; the Marshall Plan was elaborated in 1947–1948 to act as its economic tool and in 1949 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an aggressive military bloc was established. Under the auspices of NATO the United States succeeded in grouping the capitalist countries under her leadership in an aggressive military alliance against socialism.

Each decision taken by this organization was imbued with an aggressive stance. Its military plans reckoned with the possibility of a world war starting at any time up to 1954. Soon, the Korean War, which enjoyed American support and was later waged with direct and substantial US involvement, broke out in 1950. On the European scene the rearmament of the Federal Republic of Germany began. It was the country destined to emerge as the strongest "defensive" line of NATO in the East.

The aggressive policy leading circles in the United States

pursued against the socialist countries was formulated very sharply in the US Congress. In June 1950, the Defence Commission adopted the "Lodge Act", submitted by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. It decreed that a "foreign legion" be established under the scheme; 12,500 persons from among the reactionary and fascist elements who had fled from the East European countries, were to be recruited and armed up to 1953. It was decided later to increase the number to 25,000 by 1955.

The other substantial law was passed in 1951. Congress adopted Article 101(a) of the Mutual Security Bill on October 12, 1951. It authorised the spending of 100 million dollars annually on financing activities carried on by "any selected persons who are residing in or escapees from the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Lithuania, Latvia and Esthonia... to form such persons into elements of the military forces supporting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or for other purposes". It became evident from the comments made by Senators in discussing the law that "other purposes" meant espionage, sabotage and subversion.² In the summer of 1956 Congress approved an additional sum of 25 million dollars to supplement the initial 100 million dollars.

All these measures posed a direct threat to the security and the peaceful life of socialist Hungary. Several demonstrative steps taken by the leading circles of the United States against the People's Republic of Hungary testified to this threat. For example, in a note dating from July 5, 1951, the Administration of the United States declared Article 7, which contained the essence of the friendship, commercial and consular agreement concluded on June 24, 1925 and renewed in March 1948, as null and void. Radio Free Europe began its inflammatory broadcasts, the reactionary Hungarian emigrés were reactivated and their organizations given substantial financial assistance. The magazine of the Hungarian fascist military emigrés *Hadak Útján* (On Armies'

²Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1951. Princeton University Press 1953, pp. 128-129.

Path) wrote with confidence in its May 1950 issue, "only armed force can open up the path for the return of the homeless Hungarians to their homeland... and we have good reason to believe that with the development of world affairs the military might of the United States will open up the path for our return home".

In the early 1950s, however, a powerful socialist world community including a number of European and Asian countries stood in the path of the war policies pursued by the United States. Despite the major efforts that had been made in pursuit of the principal objective of "containment", this goal could not be achieved. Painful though it was, the policy had to be subjected to reappraisal. To their disappointment the ideologists of "containment" were obliged to conclude that it had suffered a setback; the establishment of the socialist world system represented the failure of this policy.³

The collapse of the nuclear monopoly and the fact that America was no longer invulnerable had a sobering effect on the imperialists. Recognition of these facts made a very great impression on the whole of American public opinion. American historian D. F. Fleming, Professor at the Department of International Relations at Vanderbilt University, Tennessee, wrote that the American people had realized that, practically overnight, a period of great security had become one of great danger.⁴

Those who thought in more sober terms recognized the necessity of peace, but the leading imperialist circles sought new methods and new tactics. The fundamental principle of the new policy, the doctrine of "liberation" was pronounced by Dwight Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles during the 1952 Presidential campaign in the United States. They described the countries engaged in the building of socialism "captive nations" and pledged action to help all captive nations to resist.

³J. Scott: *Political Warfare; A Guide to Competitive Coexistence*. The John Day Company, New York 1955, pp. 22-23.

⁴D. F. Fleming: *The Cold War and its Origins 1917-1960*. New York 1961, pp. 806-807.

In an address in Cincinnati on September 21, 1952, Eisenhower stated that "these principles demand that every political, every economic and psychological tactic be used". In a speech in Trenton on October 17, 1952, he made a special appeal to the Hungarian fascist emigré organizations and pledged to do everything in his power to liberate the "suffering and subjugated" Hungarians.

Shortly after taking office President Eisenhower sent a message to Congress on February 20, 1953, about "solidarity with the oppressed peoples". It was adopted as a resolution by Congress on February 26. An address by Secretary of State Foster Dulles prepared the adoption of the resolution in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. A similar resolution was adopted by Congress in August 1955.

On January 25, 1954, Eisenhower sent a letter of greetings to the conference of the International Peasant Association expressing his appreciation of the results achieved by the reactionary emigré leaders in the field of "acquiring information" by which they were serving the policy of "liberation".

In his "Christmas message", which subsequently earned a dubious reputation, the American President formulated his policy once again in very clear terms: "The peaceful liberation of the captive countries has been, is, and until success is achieved will continue to be a major goal of United States foreign policy."⁵

In his speeches and at press conferences on January 9, 1956, June 27, 1956, July 11, 1956, and so on, John Foster Dulles spoke of his "high hopes". In his view, hopeful and highly promising changes were taking place in the socialist countries. These made it worth-while for the United States to run the risk, if necessary, of minor, local wars and not to be frightened of moving to "the brink of war". Secretary of State Dulles said in an interview carried on January 16, 1956 by *Life* magazine that the ability to get to the verge without getting into war was a necessary art. He added that if one tries to run away from it, if one is scared to go to the brink, one is lost.

⁵K. T. Holt: *op. cit.*, p. 19.

This statement aroused high hopes among the leaders of the reactionary emigré circles.

Following the declaration of the policy of "liberation", a veritable army of experts rushed to the assistance of the United States Administration and works discussing the strategy and tactics of this policy were published in great numbers. The authors believed the theory of "containment" erred in being "too passive and purely a defensive policy in respect of the strategic viewpoints"; they were critical of the fact that it did not aim at bringing about any change in the status quo. In a book entitled *Containment or Liberation?* and published in 1953, J. Burnham stated that the policy of "containment" must always constitute part and parcel of a broader-ranging offensive plan and the most appropriate moment for taking the initiative and moving into the attack must be waited for because without that there is no victory.

The advocates of "liberation" set out from the idea that Communism had to be forced to withdraw behind the 1939 borders and that the "captive countries" had to be liberated by weapons or in a "peaceful" way by using military, economic, psychological, diplomatic and political means in all the important fields.⁶

In George F. Kennan's view the idea of "liberation" contained a dual objective: partly overthrowing Soviet power by force everywhere, including the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies and partly that destruction of this power should become the active foreign policy goal of the Western governments, in particular, the United States Administration. He wrote that the decisive stimulation necessary for this purpose had to be given from outside and not from inside, from the Soviet sphere itself.

The above view expresses completely the aggressive nature of the policy of "liberation" and the external threat it constituted to the socialist countries. George F. Kennan, who is considered to be a cautious and moderate politician in the West and, in a certain sense, often mentioned as a

⁶J. Burnham: *Containment or Liberation?* The John Day Company, New York 1953. p. 138 and p. 222.

supporter of the idea of peaceful coexistence, admitted that active interference with the internal affairs of other countries was indispensable for the implementation of the policy of "liberation". He stated that Soviet power could not be overthrown if the effort to this effect failed to gain the assistance of some kind of strong internal political movement. He was quite optimistic about this particular part of the draft because he believed that friends on the farside of the Iron Curtain were expecting encouragement and guidance.⁷

The leaders and chief ideologists of international imperialism nurtured the hope that the overwhelming majority of the population of the People's Democracies was opposed to socialist power and that there was a wide gap between the "government and the people". According to their view, this created favourable circumstances for the development of a major "resistance" movement which will shake the very foundations of the socialist system. They repeatedly emphasized that each error, difficulty, vacillation and change taking place in the process of building socialism must be fully exploited.

It was considered an issue of top priority to weaken friendship between the peoples engaged in socialist construction by every possible means and to undermine their joining of forces. According to a series of articles carried by *The New York Times* (April 18, 21 and 23, 1956), the task was to exploit the differences of opinion, differences of interests and contrasting intentions of the East European peoples. It was their overriding intention to separate and divide the elements making up the socialist world system, and to destroy the achievements of socialism one by one in the individual countries after they have been separated from the system. They reckoned with three factors as helping in the achievement of their goals:

1. The internal forces within the individual countries: a) reactionary groups; b) internal difficulties; c) dissatisfaction.

⁷G. F. Kennan: *Realities of American Foreign Policy*. Oxford University Press, London 1954. pp. 77-80 and p. 94.

2. Disruptive forces within the socialist community: a) disputes between the individual countries affiliated to the community, but first of all with the Soviet Union; b) anti-Soviet atmosphere; c) nationalism.

3. External forces: a) determination on the part of the capitalist world, above all, of the United States; b) active subversive activities carried on by the imperialist organs.

In essence, the doctrine of "liberation" was a war policy. It called for a new military approach to be adopted in order to translate ideas into practice. 1953 saw the birth of the "new look" in warfare. It aimed at expanding the role of nuclear arms as weapons of mass destruction, and at ensuring the strategic reserves suitable for "limited" war. The leaders of the United States threatened "mass retaliation" in the event of conflict at any part of the world. The new concepts continued the idea of increasing the pressure on the socialist countries, above all, on the Soviet Union, by intensifying the military threat.

In his book published in 1954, Thomas K. Finletter gave a very good formulation of the joint objective of "liberation" and the "new look": "Our political objective in the NATO area—the result we want, but are not willing to go to war to get—is to roll back the Russian power not only out of our own countries, but out of the enslaved satellites and out of Russia itself... We hope very much indeed that Russian Communism will be destroyed somehow... We hope it will collapse and we will help it collapse if we can."⁸

George F. Kennan also admitted that "...we are talking about a path of policy which, if pushed far enough, would by every law of probability lead ultimately to war".

In his book he plays a sort of "peaceful tune" and, accordingly, he supplements his position with the following statement: "...the day of total wars has passed and... from now on limited military operations are the only ones that could conceivably serve any coherent purpose."⁹

This is how the policy of "liberation" that can be imple-

⁸T. K. Finletter: *Power and Policy*. New York 1954, pp. 106-107.

⁹G. F. Kennan: *op. cit.*, p. 77 and p. 80.

mented with a "local war" was formulated. Many people were opposed to the idea of a total war because power relations had changed. Instead, they proposed special war, in other words, political or psychological warfare which, according to James Burnham's work referred to earlier, is the only alternative to unlimited nuclear war.

Quite a few studies and articles have been published about political or psychological warfare above all in the United States, in the Federal Republic of Germany, in the United Kingdom and France. The definition and interpretation of political warfare adopted during the preparation of the 1956 counter-revolution in Hungary was summarized by the well-known American journalist John Scott in his book "Political Warfare", published in 1955. "The basic aim of destructive political warfare is to weaken and, if possible, destroy the enemy by the use of diplomatic manoeuvres, economic pressure, information and misinformation, provocation and intimidation, sabotage and terrorism, and by the isolation of the enemy from his friends and supporters... while harrying Communist governments and driving wedges between them and their peoples..."¹⁰

In his book entitled *The Programme for an Attack on World Communism* General D. Sarnoff lists the organization of acts of terrorism, the intensification of propaganda activities and maximum assistance to be given to underground organizations operating in the People's Democracies as the actions belonging to the sphere of "political struggle".

According to this interpretation, political struggle can be defined as a campaign carried on by the imperialist governments against socialism or against all socialist countries with all the "peaceful means" at their disposal with the object of overthrowing working class power and the power of the working people. To this end the NATO countries united their forces under the leadership of the imperialists of the United States.

Following the declaration of the doctrine of "liberation",

¹⁰J. Scott: *op. cit.*, p. 19 and p. 28.

at least a dozen governmental agencies and half a dozen private organizations embarked on planning and executing political warfare operations.

Of the private organizations, the "Crusade for Freedom" established in 1949 played an outstanding and coordinating role. It relied on the effective support given by an American foundation and millions of dollars raised from American citizens to pursue the struggle against the socialist countries. This organization was joined by the Radio Free Europe Committee, the leading body of which included the leading politicians (Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, etc.) and capitalists of the United States.

A specific division of labour was established between private and governmental organizations. Although the private organizations were also founded and led by renowned politicians and leading government officials, they were registered as private enterprises in order that they could undertake regular fund-raising campaigns among "Americans enthusiastic about noble objectives" and, by doing so, provide their activities with a screen of a "democratic and popular nature". But principally this method was adopted with the purpose of avoiding being bound by the rules of the game of diplomacy in selecting the means and methods to be used. The private organizations were allowed a completely free hand, while governmental organizations had to be careful to keep up appearances and observe diplomatic rules.

In the time of the Eisenhower Administration the governmental and private organizations were coordinated by the National Security Council of the United States. In the opinion of John Scott, the National Security Council of the United States was the logical body to plan and coordinate major political warfare activity in all fields.

The Operations Coordinating Board, established in 1953 and subordinated to the National Security Council of the United States, was designed to direct the political warfare activities. John Scott writes that from 1953 on "charged by the President with increasing understanding and cooperation among peoples, Rockefeller was presumably the overall

political warfare planner and coordinator".¹¹ (In 1956 this role was filled by William E. Griffith.)

That was the system of organization and direction by which it was ensured that the organizations representing a wide variety of forces and very different ideas could be active for the promotion of a central goal. That was the manner in which the private organizations became the "officially non-official instruments" of United States foreign policy.¹²

¹¹J. Scott: *op. cit.*, pp. 219-220.

¹²R. T. Holt: *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Chapter 3

The First Phase of Operation FOCUS (1954-1955)

3.1. The Beginnings of Intervention

In 1953 and 1954, the Radio Free Europe Committee already had the political experience, the millions of dollars, and the technical facilities which were regarded as necessary for planning and implementing an actual action programme and a political campaign against the individual European socialist countries. It is worth recalling the previous two attempts which had provided them with, among other things, the required experience.

American and British diplomacy as well as the intelligence organizations endeavoured to achieve a rightist takeover in Albania. An action programme had been elaborated for organizing an internal "resistance movement". To this end an organization named the Free Albanian Committee was set up in Italy in the summer of 1949. Under its auspices some 300 "guerillas" were trained. They infiltrated into the Albanian mountains in the spring of 1950, assigned the task of creating unrest, recruiting supporters and initiating a nation-wide uprising on a given signal. This attempt at fomenting or uprising proved to be abortive; close on half of the agents were captured while the rest escaped into Greece. Today we know that the activities of Kim Philby, the Soviet intelligence officer, largely contributed to the failure of this action.¹³

The other action designed to gain experience was organized against Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1953. It was an independent effort on the part of the Free Europe Com-

¹³*Der Spiegel*, January 29, 1968.

mittee. The campaign was launched on July 13, 1953 under the code name: Operation Prospero. In the course of a major operation lasting for four days some 12 million leaflets were dropped by 6,512 balloons on certain parts of Czechoslovakia specified in advance, primarily in the area of Prague, Plzen and Ostrava. During the operation the period of the daily transmissions of the Voice of Free Czechoslovakia was augmented to twenty hours. The content of the campaign was defined by its slogan: Every Czech and Slovak for freedom! The whole free world for the Czechs and Slovaks! This slogan was spread on aluminium plates as well with the assistance of balloons.

After the operation Allan A. Mickie, the then Assistant General Director of Radio Free Europe, wrote with some pride: "...Careful analysis of the results convinced the RFE-FEP staff that they had pioneered a technique in political warfare by combining the qualities of radio and the printed word."¹⁴

The Free Europe Commission was assisted in the implementation of its "liberation" programme by three institutions.

Radio Free Europe Press issued publications, books hostile to the socialist countries, and instigating documents and leaflets from time to time. Studies like *Svobodna Europa* (Free Europe) and *Kedy to skoncy?* (How Long Will All That Last?) and leaflets were made under its auspices. In addition, it issued a fortnightly airmail news letter on ten pages under the name *Szabad Magyarország* (Free Hungary). The printed materials were sent and dropped behind the "Iron Curtain" mostly by means of balloons.

The instigating and subversive objectives of Radio Free Europe were very accurately formulated by the then president of the organization Charles D. Jackson in a statement given to a reporter of *The New York Times*, Jack Raymong, on November 24, 1951. Jackson said that they wanted to create preconditions for internal disorder in the countries to

which the broadcasts were directed. The time for thinking of giving possible military assistance to such ventures would come if the peoples of the satellite countries were to succeed in initiating, on their own soil, military movements which could be utilized.

Some two thousand people employed by Radio Free Europe and 29 high-power transmitters, six or seven of which broadcast programmes to Hungary, were engaged in implementing the programme formulated by Charles D. Jackson. They regularly collected data on the situation and domestic problems of the individual socialist countries. By 1954 they had filed some 42 thousand cards containing data about the plants, offices, internal situation of the People's Republic of Hungary and the debates going on inside the country. There was also a separate "Black Book" in which they had collected what was described as compromising information about individual leaders and officials.

Information was collected by the agents of Radio Free Europe. They approached people travelling to the West from the People's Democracies, sportsmen, tourists and, of course, those who defected to the West. Sometimes hearings lasted for several days. The agents were interested in everything relating to the domestic life and problems of the given country.

The institution named *Relations of the Exiles of Free Europe* gave financial assistance to the organizations of emigrés who followed the imperialists' "liberation" policy without reservation and participated in the subversive activities against the People's Democracies. It was this organization affiliated to the Free Europe Committee which financed the so-called national committees including the *Magyar Nemzeti Bizottmány* (Hungarian National Committee).

The International Peasant Association and several other organizations were also operating with the assistance of the Free Europe Committee. In April 1951, Ferenc Nagy and his associates set up the Central and East Europe Committee with the task of coordinating subversive propaganda and different actions conducted against the European People's Democracies. With the assistance of the Ford Foundation

¹⁴A. A. Mickie: *Voices Through the Iron Curtain: The Radio Free Europe Story*, New York 1963, pp. 140-141.

the reactionary emigré leaders organized the Assembly of European Captive Nations, the so-called "little United Nations" in September 1954 with the object of exerting mounting political pressure on the European socialist countries.

It was also a common task of the different organizations to mould public opinion in the capitalist countries and to persuade people to accept the concept of "liberation" as necessary and to believe that it could succeed. In all of these committees and organizations the politicians embarked on elaborating the programmes to be implemented following "liberation", and how to bring about a restoration of capitalism adjusted to the new conditions.

There was also another type of groupings made up of military organizations. These organizations trained former military people to take part in the "liberation of their captive country" with arms. In general the organizations of military emigrés were set up in Europe and they were active, as a rule, on territories lying close to the socialist countries. They made efforts to establish underground resistance movements in the individual nations and tried to send their agents regularly to the countries concerned. In addition, they also took an active part in reconnaissance activities.

The Hungarian Section of Radio Free Europe was supplemented with a strong military unit which included the following organizations: Revolutionary Tribunal, Special Service, Freedom Fighters' Bureau, Department of Terrorism, etc. An important task was assigned to the *Magyar Harcosok Bajtársi Szövetsége* (MHBK) (Fraternal Association of Hungarian Fighters). It was engaged in arming exiled military officers and in organizing them for subversive activities under the leadership of General Zákó of the former Arrow Cross Party.

The MHBK was one of the first organizations to be established shortly after the war to rally the officers of the Arrow Cross Party, those loyal to the Horthy regime who had made their escape to the West, and the large numbers of servicemen, taken to the West by their military units. The organization operated very effectively among those living in camps, where there was much misery and a barely support-

able existence. Its strongest branches operated on the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria and France.

The activities of the Free Europe Committee and its institutions were directed against the following five People's Democracies: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania. A concerted political campaign was launched against two of them in 1954: Operation VETO against Czechoslovakia and Operation FOCUS against Hungary.

The question may well arise why these two countries were the chosen targets of a coordinated political attack since in the early 1950s errors had been committed in all the People's Democracies and unlawful actions had also occurred in them. The pundits of the Free Europe Committee were of the opinion that maximum attention had to be paid to Czechoslovakia and Hungary (with the order of selection: Czechoslovakia followed by Hungary). Although Poland was also in the focus of their attention, that country had no common border with any of the capitalist countries allowing for direct intervention should the occasion present itself, and so it was dropped and priority was given to Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

The elaboration of the programme of Operation VETO against Czechoslovakia began at the end of 1953. It took five months to prepare the action plan. Those in charge of the operation attempted to translate, in essence, the idea of "liberation through liberalization" into political action. They listed "10 demands of popular opposition" and from April 29, 1954 a total of three million wall leaflets bearing the number "10" were sent to Czechoslovakia with the aid of balloons.

The list of demagogic demands was as follows:

1. Trade unions should belong to the union members!
2. More pay — less talk!
3. No tying of working people to their work-places!
4. No encroachment on the leisure time of the working people!
5. An end to serfdom!
6. Fewer compulsory deliveries — higher yields!

7. Local autonomy instead of bureaucracy!
8. Goods to the people, not to the Soviet Union!
9. Serve the interests of consumers!
10. Homes for families, not the state!

As from May 1, Radio Free Europe increased broadcasts of programmes in Czech and Slovak. The transmissions propagated the ten demands and tried to whip up "popular resistance". One million copies of an eight page pamphlet entitled *Svobodna Europa* (Free Europe) were printed and distributed with the same objective.

On May 16, National Committee Elections took place in Czechoslovakia. Radio Free Europe Press flooded the country with some 20 million "ballot papers". These so-called "ballot papers of popular resistance" contained the ten demands.

Between July and September, Operation VETO was directed principally against compulsory deliveries to the state within the framework of a campaign called "self-defence harvest". In the autumn of 1954, however, during the election of the workshop committees, attention was focused on the workers. Radio broadcasts and leaflets urged them not to elect Communists to be members of the workshop committees.

Within the frame of Operation VETO Czechoslovakia was flooded with no less than 41 million leaflets and over 50 tons of other types of printed material carried by balloons. Although the results of the campaign were far from being satisfactory for the organizers, they provided experience of value for use in future actions.

Dating from September 8, 1954, the Free Europe Committee published a document named "Hungary, instruction No. 15, Operation FOCUS". It summarized the essence and tasks ahead of the operation. The date set for launching the campaign was October 1.

The action programme named "Operation FOCUS" was a long term operation the final aim of which was eventual liberation as in his book *Radio Free Europe* political warfare expert Robert T. Holt described the immediate goal of the operation. It was to enthuse and encourage the domestic

enemy to motivate them to organize, to give them a programme and to let them know that the "Free World", first of all the United States, was ready to give every assistance to their activities. On October 8, 1954 the extremist right-wing periodical *Új Hungária* (New Hungary) published in Munich stated: "The principal objective of the new action is to offer moral and psychological assistance to the resistance movement that is already under way in Hungary... to coordinate and focus its activities. That is why it was named Operation FOCUS."

Concerning the overthrow of a People's Democracy the Free Europe Committee was of the opinion that "...it is likely to occur only as the result of a favourable convergence of events within and outside of the country. Internally this means that coordinated mass opposition must evolve and gather strength during the pre-liberation period. Outside the country it means that the 'People's Opposition Center in the Free World' must provide initiative, tangible symbols and (in part) the ideological basis for sustained resistance. Without external support the Opposition Center would wither in isolation. Without internal receptivity the efforts of the free world would indeed become pointless and unnecessary attempts at interference.

"Given, however, a favourable relationship of internal and external components, and given the right moment when in the course of international events the Soviet Union finds it less painful not to intervene than to intervene, then coordinated mass opposition becomes coordinated mass action, actively supported by the 'Opposition Center Outside'."¹⁵

The organs and organizations of international imperialism operated a substantial machinery to study the internal situation of the "target" countries, first and foremost that of Hungary, to determine the possibility of eliminating the socialist social system. While deliberately ignoring the remarkable results achieved in the course of socialist construction, they exaggerated the problems which were, incidentally, growing in number, and they hoped that they would

¹⁵R. T. Holt: *op. cit.*, p. 157.

be able to penetrate through the cracks that had developed. It must be noted in this connection that the overcoming in a relatively short time of the serious consequences of the profound shock that occurred at the end of 1956 was due, first of all, to the very results of socialist construction they had chosen to ignore.

3.2. The Internal Situation of Hungary

In Hungary, a solid basis was established for people's power following the crushing of the feudal-capitalist state and the related state machinery, the distribution of the big holdings and church-owned estates among the peasants, the expropriation of capital and the nationalization of the means of production. In the wake of the elimination of the power of the former ruling classes, the working people emerged as the only source of power. They had become the masters of the country and the representatives of the working class took the direction of the country's affairs into their own hands.

In 1949, 176 of the 402 members of Parliament were workers, 115 were peasants and 71 were women. Between 1949 and 1953 almost 50 thousand physical workers were given high positions: they were appointed to lead firms and factories and held leading posts in the various ministries, in the armed forces, etc.

The share of industry in the national income had reached almost 60 per cent by 1956. Compared to 1938 the production of the engineering industry had trebled. Remarkable changes had also taken place in the structure of agricultural production, the mechanization of agriculture had increased. Some 33 per cent of Hungary's tillable land, about one third of the livestock and all of the major agricultural machines were owned by the socialist sector in 1956.

Books, the theatre and the cinema had become accessible to everyone. The gates of schools had been opened wide for working people and their children; 55 per cent of the young people studying at colleges and universities in the academic

year of 1956-57 were of working class and peasant background.

The social and living conditions of the working people had also undergone substantial changes. The equivalent of more than 30 per cent of total wages and salaries was spent on free social insurance per annum. Social insurance covered 60 per cent of the population.

The results listed above indicated the direction in which Hungary was developing but because of counter-acting factors these tendencies could prevail fully only after the period of crisis had been overcome.

Development, however, was not unbroken even in the early 1950s. The policies pursued by the Working People's Party in directing the affairs of the country contained a growing number of errors which affected every area of society. "From the end of 1948, the clique led by Rákosi and Gerő which had a decisive influence in the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party and in the Government of the Peoples's Republic of Hungary had started to deviate from the basic principles of Marxism—Leninism." The essence of the matter was described in the Resolution of the Provisional Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party on December 6, 1956.¹⁶

Basking in the halo of a self-generated conviction of infallibility, the sectarian and dogmatic leadership hampered the development and utilization of the creative energies of the masses in the political, cultural and economic fields. A style of leadership based on issuing commands and bureaucracy disillusioned and alarmed masses of honest people. The harmful methods adopted led to serious illegal actions in both the party and the state organs.

"The incorrect theory that, throughout the period of socialist construction the class struggle inevitably and constantly becomes sharper, combined with what has become known as the Cult of Personality, led to an overall lack of confidence and to serious violation of legality. Those who

¹⁶*Resolutions and Documents of the HSWP, 1956-1962*, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1964, p. 13.

suffered most from the consequences were the active party cadres. The May 22, 1951 resolution of the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party on 'Cadre Policy' work assumed that the class enemy had fundamentally infiltrated the party from the leading bodies down to the branches. From this assumption it naturally followed that seeking the enemy in the ranks of the party was the guiding principle of work with cadres. This caused serious damage."¹⁷

The application of this "principle" had very serious consequences. In the first half of 1949, legal proceedings were started against László Rajk and other comrades on the basis of false charges. At a mass rally Mátyás Rákosi boasted: "It was no easy job to elaborate how they should be exposed; I must confess that it took me quite a few sleepless nights to give a form to the plan of execution."¹⁸

An avalanche of arrests and trials based on false charges followed in the wake of the Rajk case. First, Rákosi and his clique settled accounts with several Communists in the leadership of the armed forces (like György Pálffy, László Sólyom); this was followed by arrests and trials of former left-wing Social Democratic leaders (like Árpád Szakasits, György Marosán) and of leaders who had been active in the underground Communist movement before 1945 (János Kádár, Gyula Kállai and other comrades).

The culpability of the clique around Mátyás Rákosi was aggravated by the fact that they levelled unfounded charges and slanders against some leaders and members of some of the fraternal parties, thus causing great damage to the cause of socialism internationally.

While administrative struggle against the class enemy was carried on in a spectacular way, the real power and illegal organizations of the class enemy were not crashed. At the same time, however, several measures, such as deportation from cities and persecution of rich peasants (*kulaks*), etc.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 515.

¹⁸M. Rákosi: *Válogatott beszédek és cikkek*. (Selected Speeches and Articles). Szikra, Budapest 1950, p. 476.

hit hard at people who wished to adjust themselves to the new power and at many innocent persons. This caused mounting disappointment in certain strata of society. Illegal procedures to which honest working people were also subjected very often ended in raising hostile elements to the status of martyrs in public opinion instead of exposing them.

The fact that between 1951 and May 1, 1953, that is during two years and four months, the police acting as petty offence court imposed 850,000 punishments which took the form of fines in the overwhelming majority of cases, is an indication of the excessive dimensions of "seeking" the enemy and the use of administrative measures. Between 1950 and the first quarter of 1953, that is during three years and three months, the courts dealt with cases involving 650,000 people and 377,000 sentences were passed. It is also a characteristic figure that during four years, between 1952 and 1955—based on information lodged with the courts or the police—1,136,434 persons were investigated. Charges were brought against and sentences passed on 45 per cent, that is, 516,708 persons out of the total of one million against whom reports had been lodged with the authorities. A considerable proportion of sentences was imposed on peasants for failing to comply adequately with the regulations concerning compulsory delivery of crops to the state. The serious negative effects brought about a crisis of confidence among law-abiding working people who desired security of living and working conditions.

In the early stages of socialist construction—quite correctly—priority was given to eliminating the backwardness of industry and to ending the overwhelming dependence of the economy on agriculture. The centrally-planned economy aimed at transforming the property relations and at ensuring much faster economic growth. However, the leadership dominated by Rákosi and Gerő ignored Hungary's real endowments even in the field of economic policies and set objectives totally divorced from reality. In a country completely unsuitable for economic autarchy, the priority given to the development of the heavy and machine industries, similar to the practice and concept of self-reliance adopted in

the other socialist countries, was so excessive as to entirely ignore not only the issue of natural resources and the need for a base in special training, but also the potential inherent in the economic cooperation between the socialist countries. These economic policies were defined to a very large extent by justified defence considerations but they were also directly influenced by the concept of an inevitable war in the immediate future. In the first year of the First Five Year Plan period expenditures on military and on civilian purposes were almost identical.

In addition to lack of experience and objective difficulties, the correct implementation of economic policies was hampered by voluntarism and impatience. It was also a major source of error that economic managers set out from the assumption that increased savings and investment necessarily lead to rapid economic growth. The rate of growth was regarded completely as a function of investment.

The disproportionate development of the nation's economy was demonstrated most obviously by the slogan: "We are engaged in building a country of iron and steel." Excessive concentration of the decisive proportion of resources on metallurgy and mining made it impossible to develop even the heavy industry in line with advanced contemporary standards.

The reality of a too ambitious central management disregarding the endowments of the country was reflected by a series of plan modifications. The goals of the First Five Year Plan started in 1950 were on the average doubled at the Second Congress of the Hungarian Working People's Party in February 1951. The modified plan set higher targets to be achieved by 1954; a 200 per cent increase of industrial production instead of the original 86.4 per cent. The output of heavy industry was to increase by 280 per cent instead of 104. Investments were to be by 70 per cent higher than in the original plan. In certain fields of the national economy an "extremely rapid" progress was envisaged for the plan period. For example, mining output was to grow by 142 per cent instead of 55.2 per cent; metallurgy by 162 per cent instead of 15 per cent. In the course of the implementation of

the plan, the quality and the profitability of production were completely ignored. Measures and the control measures were all focused on merely fulfilling the plan targets.

The subjectivism of economic development, the absence of proportions and contradictions had an evident and serious effect on agriculture. Under such conditions it was impossible to accomplish the programme of the promotion of agricultural growth and the collectivization of agricultural farming, the two major and interdependent goals of socialist agricultural policy. Agricultural production exceeded steadily the pre-war average and total output only from 1957.

In agriculture the leadership resorted to the practice of management by compulsion. The obligations of farmers were increased year after year, and quite often during the same year. The system of compulsory delivery of crops to the state and taxation rendered the peasantry completely indifferent to the development of production. Peasant indifference reached such dimensions that by 1953 over 10 per cent of Hungary's tillable land, almost 2 million acres, was left uncultivated. In 1952, enforcement of the system of compulsory deliveries led to a situation in which two-thirds of all peasant families did not have enough cereals left for seed grain on their own consumption.

In the course of the collectivization of agriculture the principle of voluntary joining was regularly violated. This stemmed first of all from the concept that the socialist transformation of agriculture should be achieved in a matter of three or four years. The organs of local administration were virtually competing to see who could best accomplish or even overfulfil the related tasks and plans. In the process, they undermined the Leninist principles of establishing socialist agriculture in the eyes of the working peasants.

In the early 1950s the living standards of workers and peasants fell instead of rising. There was a decrease not only in terms of the per capita real wages in the ranks of workers and employees but also in per capita real income despite a large number of people joining the active labour force. The price level of 1953 was almost twice as high as in 1949 and

real wages per one breadwinner were some 20 to 22 per cent lower than in the first year of the First Five Year Plan.

The destructive effect of this erroneous policy was aggravated by the fact that this policy was pursued with the frequent citations of the "Soviet example". When a new measure was about to be introduced the leadership dominated by Rákosi and Gerő invariably emphasized that the decision had been made on the basis of Soviet experience. In practice, this meant that the Soviet Union was seen as somehow responsible for the harmful consequences of the incorrect measures.

This went hand in hand with a general underestimation of progressive national traditions, and an overemphasis of certain democratic traditions. Certain outstanding events of the revolutionary working class movement were played down as having been led by enemy elements that had infiltrated the movement or by people who had later become hostile. All this evoked profound indignation or created more favourable conditions for the revival of nationalism. The Rákosi and Gerő dominated party leadership consistently endeavoured to erase the revolutionary memories of the 1919 Republic of Councils from national consciousness, an attitude which was obviously related to the aim of pushing Communists and patriots who had been active in the underground movement before 1945 into the background and to increasing persecution of the same people. At the same time, under the pretext of waging a struggle against nationalism, century-old customs and forms associated with national tradition were discarded and national sensibilities violated.

Comrade János Kádár was quite justified in stating in a radio address he made during the days of struggle against counter-revolution on November 11, 1956: "I must also say that not the Soviet Union or the Soviet people were in need of the boot-licking measures by which Rákosi and company seriously violated the national feelings of our people; they were needed by those flatterers who, while breaking away from their own people, wanted to justify themselves by

adopting the method of slavish copying and of establishing a personal monopoly of Soviet friendship."¹⁹

The leadership of the party did not speak about the grave situation and this made the situation even worse. Only the achievements were listed in the speeches. A wide gap developed between words and deeds, between declared policy and reality.

However, the party did have the strength to attempt to identify its errors and eliminate them. The ideological struggle waged by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to expose the cult of personality, to reveal and eliminate its detrimental consequences was of invaluable assistance to the sound forces within the Hungarian Party. During a consultation between the leaders of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of Hungary at the end of May 1953, the Soviet leaders brought up the issue of the personality cult in the Hungarian Working People's Party in a manner indicative of a thorough preliminary analysis on the Soviet side. They also criticized the harmful consequences of the illegal actions, voluntarist economic policies, as well as the separation of the leadership from the working masses of the Hungarian people. Under the influence of the comradely advice voiced at the meeting as well as of the analysis of the domestic situation, the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party revised its policy at a session on June 27 and 28, 1953.

The Central Leadership was very firm and critical in its analysis of the real situation and in disclosing the errors. While summarizing the achievements of historic importance which had brought about fundamental changes, the meeting pointed out the errors very openly. The resolution passed by the Central Leadership listed in detail the consequences of "the party leadership's over-concentration on industrialization, especially on developing heavy industry at a forced pace while ignoring agricultural production"; at the same time "the development of agricultural cooperatives at too fast a rate and, to this end, the use of force and administra-

¹⁹Népszabadság, November 12, 1956.

tive pressure at places as well as the complicated and constantly changing system of compulsory delivery to the state brought about a feeling of uncertainty among working peasants". These errors led to harmful consequences, "they had an unfavourable influence on the living standards of the population including those of the working class, they loosened the relations of the party with the working class and, in general, led to a deterioration of relations of the party and the state with the working masses and resulted in serious difficulties in the national economy".

The resolution adopted by the Central Leadership passed a sharp judgement on the causes of these errors. It stated that "one of the cardinal reasons for the grave mistakes in the party's political line, economic policy and practical activities lay in the internal situation of the party or party leadership, in the incorrect method of leadership, in the erroneous cadre policy, in the inadequate relations between party and state leadership and in the backwardness of ideological work". The resolution also pointed very firmly to the principal sources of errors, the absence of collective leadership, the substitution of collective leadership by individual leadership, the cult of personality". In this connection "Comrades Rákosi, Gerő, Farkas and Révai" were criticized personally for having adopted the practice of "clique-type leadership".

The objective of ensuring the progress of building socialism, which was designed to serve the purpose of the constant development of the living standards of the working masses was in the focus of the measures taken by the Central Leadership. The resolution specified the tasks relating to the establishment and enforcement of collective leadership, the strengthening of democracy within the party and the separation of party and state leadership. Accordingly, the Central Leadership elected Mátyás Rákosi First Secretary of the Party and Imre Nagy was appointed chairman of the Council of Ministers (Prime Minister).²⁰

The June 1953 meeting of the Central Leadership could

not yet disclose the economic causes and roots of the errors of economic policy but it took a decision to the effect that working groups composed of specialists be set up to accomplish that task within a year. The groups got down to work but no results were achieved. This failure was attributable to political reasons, because instead of disclosing the underlying causes and creating the base for a new policy a period of haphazard measures, swinging to the right and left alternately followed. These measures not only slowed down but occasionally prevented the implementation of the June 1953 resolutions.

Even the first step taken towards implementing a correct policy was mishandled. The resolution was not published as such in the name of the Central Leadership; its terms became known to party membership and the public at large when it was presented to Parliament by Imre Nagy on July 4, 1953 as the programme of his government. This gave the politically active public opinion the impression that not the party but the government headed by Imre Nagy had identified the tasks and developed the necessary programme to change the grave situation. When the Central Leadership called a national meeting of activists on July 11, the principal speaker was Mátyás Rákosi. There was no element of self-criticism at that meeting; instead of discussing the errors and how to approach the work of eliminating them, emphasis was laid on disclosing what was described as "new distortions". This created great confusion and prevented those present from finding the right policy line.

There was no significant improvement in the situation in the years that followed, because instead of implementing appropriate policy goals, factional struggles broke out in the party's leadership disrupting the unity of the party. The faction headed by Rákosi was incapable of breaking with its errors and used every means to retain power. At the same time, the revisionist group whose members rallied around Imre Nagy had developed and grown stronger from mid-1953. Their right-wing opportunism caused serious damage to socialist reorganization in agriculture (a very large proportion of the agricultural cooperatives was disbanded),

²⁰The passages quoted on pp. 39–40 are from the Archives of the Institute of Party History (in the following: PI Archives) I/6.

and brought about problems in industrial production. The opportunism of the Nagy faction started to penetrate cultural and ideological activities. It was characteristic of the tug-of-war between left and right-wing opportunism that in the second half of 1953, the annual plan underwent 225 modifications. There was no positive change whatsoever in the situation throughout 1954 and, as a consequence, industrial production was by 2.4 per cent below that of 1953.

Instead of eliminating the errors, new mistakes were committed which, along with new problems, led to increased disappointment. Matters were made even worse within the party by the fact that the right and left wings were not only engaged in factionalism, but were ready to make unprincipled compromises and occasionally truces. For example, because of the opportunism demonstrated in the peasant policy, Imre Nagy was recalled from the Political Committee at the end of 1949, but early in 1951 he was reinstated because of his unreserved support for doubling the targets of the First Five Year Plan and his readiness to accept the portfolio of the Minister in Charge of Compulsory Deliveries. In 1951 and 1952, the system of compulsory deliveries set quite impossible burdens on a large section of the peasantry. However, Imre Nagy wrote several articles supporting the necessity of the delivery system. In 1953, on becoming Prime Minister, he posed as a champion of legality, but was ready to accept as Minister of the Interior in his government Ernő Gerő, the person very largely responsible for many of the errors. At the same time, Mihály Farkas, who had committed serious crimes in violating legality, became one of Imre Nagy's most reliable pillars. Reelected secretary of the Central Leadership of the party with Nagy's support, Farkas then became one of the most active representatives of the policy of the "new course" adopted at the June 27-28, 1953 session of the Central Leadership.

The members of the left-wing faction headed by Mátyás Rákosi tolerated for quite a long time the right-wing opportunist mistakes committed by Imre Nagy which included the discontinuation of some of the agricultural cooperatives. Instead of an ideological struggle based on principles, the

Third Congress of the Hungarian Working People's Party which was held from May 24 to 30, 1954, ended with another compromise. But this state of balance did not last long. The revisionist group gradually made headway in the autumn of 1954 and launched an attack at the October meeting of the Central Leadership. In an article after the meeting, Imre Nagy called for a "complete" revision of party policy, and at the first national congress of Patriotic People's Front (October 23-24, 1954) he emerged as the enthusiastic spokesman of national unity without class content. He spoke of how the hearts of nine and a half million Hungarians throbbed together, the souls of nine and a half million Hungarians enthused together and the strong arms of nine and a half million Hungarians strained together.

To declare a programme of national unity without class content during the initial stages of the building of socialism, in a period when the continuing political and ideological influence of the overthrown ruling classes had still to be eliminated, was both immature and untimely, in other words, it was entirely misleading.

3.3. Attack Launched by the External Enemy

The experts of Radio Free Europe recognized the opportunity. In the summer and autumn of 1954 they came to the conclusion that they had more favourable opportunities in Hungary than in Czechoslovakia. Operation FOCUS set out from the idea that there were three major differences between the situations in Czechoslovakia and Hungary in respect of the implementation of the programme. Firstly, the "new course" went further in Hungary than in Czechoslovakia and the programme of the decentralization of the economy and local administration was already under way. ("Premier Nagy, when he took over the reins of government in July 1953, admitted that the regime faced an acute crisis... and it chose to grant concessions to the people."²¹) Sec-

²¹See R. T. Holt: *op. cit.*, p. 162.

only, the opposition was spread all over Hungary and was more significant in the rural areas than in the industrial centres. Finally, the Hungarian party and its machinery revealed signs of greater internal tensions than in Czechoslovakia.²²

The disruption of the unity of the leadership was recognized in the West as well. They identified insecurity in political matters and were aware of the increased activities of the domestic hostile elements. In spite of this, however, they reckoned with the fact that the fundamental changes that had taken place in the structure of Hungarian society enjoyed the support of the masses and, for this reason, not an openly hostile but an "opposition" programme was drawn up. It took the form of 12 points of the National Resistance Movement. In content the 12 points of the programme were roughly identical with the ten points elaborated for Czechoslovakia. The only difference between them was that the programme for Hungary had been formulated with more thorough consideration. It did not call for the overthrow of the regime but set the objective of going beyond Imre Nagy's "new course". It demanded, among other things, "restoration of local autonomy and self-government, an end to persecution of the peasants and the rebirth of private agriculture, free trade unions, denationalization of retail and service trades and a shift from heavy to light industry".²³ That was the basis on which the first stage of Operation FOCUS was launched. Its principal objective was to prepare "liberation" ideologically and organizationally.

On Friday, October 1, 1954, at 5 p. m. Radio Free Europe Press launched hundreds of balloons in the direction of Hungary from its headquarters near Munich. They came in successive waves, each balloon dropping some 300 to 1,000 leaflets. In an effort to intensify the impact of the campaign, leaflet carrying rockets were also launched later.

In line with the rules of psychological warfare the leaflets contained only one word "NO" or one number "12" at the

beginning. Subsequent leaflets propagated the National Resistance Movement and detailed the 12 point programme. Another wave of balloons carried small sized newspapers, like the ten-page *Szabad Magyarország* (Free Hungary), and badges made of aluminium.

The Government of the People's Republic of Hungary protested in a note dated October 15, 1954 to the United States Administration against the subversive campaign that had assumed unprecedented dimensions and revealed the manifest intervention in Hungary's domestic affairs. The note stated that the Administration of the United States not only made the hostile action possible but gave it overt support. The openly declared objective of the action is, the note stated, "that the leaflets, couched in a tone of incitement and slander, should arouse dissatisfaction among the Hungarian people and call upon them to offer resistance to their lawful government".

The reply given by the Administration of the United States to the Hungarian note is dated December 17, 1954. Formulated in a didactic manner, the American reply summarized a 10 point programme which should be adopted by the Hungarian Government. The spirit was identical with that of the 12 points of the National Resistance Movement.

The American note contained a number of demands including the following: actual power should be delegated to the municipal councils, the rights of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly should be enforced, the services producing consumer goods should be denationalized, religion should be allowed to be practiced freely. Open interference with Hungary's domestic affairs was crowned with the cynical remark that the leaflets in question were presenting simple practical proposals which, if adopted, could eliminate the individual and admitted shortcomings.

The American reply filled the organizers of Operation FOCUS with enthusiasm. On December 31, *Új Hungária* (New Hungary) carried a comment under the banner headline "Encouraging Message", "The United States Administration is giving publicity and international support to a programme which shakes the very foundation of the regime in Hungary".

²²A. A. Mickie: *op. cit.*, p. 155.

²³A. A. Mickie: *op. cit.*, p. 158.

Radio Free Europe also joined in the implementation of the action programme and placed its influence and technical facilities at the disposal of the National Resistance Movement. It broadcast programmes designed to appeal to specific strata of society, explaining at length what the 12 points meant for the workers, peasants, men and women, etc. It paid special attention to "reviving the spirit of resistance" in the ranks of the workers. To this end a new programme was included in its broadcast schedule under the name "Workers' Resistance".

The leaders of Radio Free Europe took into consideration that the most important political force in socialism is the working class. That is why they appealed to the declassed petty bourgeois elements (who had come to be part of the working class) to start "hacking away at the Iron Curtain from the inside". The threatening tone adopted towards functionaries was intensified in order to increase tension and confusion around them. They were reminded that their "chances of living to a ripe old age were not very good". If they wanted to be forgiven, they were advised to "take the golden bridge leading to the people" and support "popular resistance". On the other hand, Radio Free Europe virtually courted youth, describing young men as courageous and heroic and calling on them "to learn to handle firearms, to lead a platoon because someday their country might need these skills".²⁴ Hostile elements were not only encouraged but given practical advice on how to make popular resistance a reality.

Within the framework of Operation FOCUS, Radio Free Europe and the National Resistance Movement were active during the preparation of the municipal elections in Hungary which took place on November 28, 1954. Their supporters were encouraged to infiltrate the municipal councils and to take advantage of the opportunities offered by local administration and decentralization. During the election cam-

²⁴R. T. Holt and R. W. van de Velde: *Strategic Psychological Operations and American Foreign Policy*. The University of Chicago Press 1960, pp. 210-211, 220-225.

paign the activities of domestic reaction intensified. There were reports of inscriptions on the walls of public buildings, on railway carriages and of the distribution of hand-written leaflets with texts similar in content to the 12 points of the National Resistance Movement. Especially in the provinces, at the nomination meetings a growing number of people attacked the system of municipal councils. In addition to voicing justified criticism (for example, critical views about the operation of the system of compulsory delivery "the power of the poor people" was attacked and an even more bellicose tone was adopted against the farmers' cooperatives.²⁵

Following the municipal elections separate leaflets and radio programmes were directed at the non-Communist members of the councils telling them what the "Hungarian people expected of them". They sought to engender conflict between the Communist and non-party councillors. In the summer of 1955, the attack was concentrated on the sectarians, personally on Mátyás Rákosi. Hundreds of thousands of leaflets were dropped on Hungarian territory with the words: "Will Rákosi vanish eventually?"

The reactionary organizations of emigrés also participated in the implementation of Operation FOCUS. Their leaders made lecture tours to address their supporters and tell them that the time was at hand and that they should make their own preparations to overthrow workers' power in Hungary. The Fraternal Association of Hungarian Fighters (*MHBK*) took action. Its leader, General Zákó, convened a meeting in Cologne on March 1, 1955. The participants decided to launch an action under the cover name "Evacuation" with the aim of collecting Hungarian emigrés living in Belgium, Holland, France and Spain who could be mobilized for actual struggle. The objective of the move was summarized in the Organizational Instructions. The task of the preparations to be made under the name "Evacuation" is to rally suitable members of *MHBK* and other Hungarians of national aspirations ready to participate in one or

²⁵PI Archives, pp. 216-384, 840, 842 and 845.

ganization for armed struggle for the liberation of our country (on the basis of voluntarily-accepted military discipline).

Their other important task was to activate former comrades who had remained in Hungary, to encourage them to organize and to give them assistance. Couriers trained in espionage courses in the United States were sent into Hungary, to establish contact with former comrades with the assistance of diplomats of some western countries accredited to Hungary.

At a later stage their subversive activities were facilitated when the technical installations sealing the Austro-Hungarian frontier were removed. In the first quarter of 1956, Hungary's borders were violated on 191 occasions by these agents. The number increased to 320 in the second quarter. There were as many as 438 border violations in August, 1956.

The related responsibility of the United States is testified by the Administration's Note to the Hungarian Government on February 3, 1956 concerning the case of arrested American spies holding Hungarian citizenship. The note was written in unusually menacing terms and expressed support for espionage and subversion. The United States Administration declared categorically that in case the Hungarian Government did not release the convicted spies the following measures would be taken: 1. negotiations designed to settle pending economic and other problems between the two countries could not be started; 2. United States passports would not be valid for travel to Hungary; 3. new restrictions would be imposed on the movements of the staff of the Hungarian diplomatic mission in Washington. Obviously, this note was rejected by the Hungarian Foreign Ministry.

3.4. Reactivating the Internal Enemy

It is a favourite assertion of the enemies of people's power that in the autumn of 1956 the events "led quite spontaneously to revolution" and no considerable organized

forces took part in the preparation of the uprising. The role played by underground organizational activity was said to be zero or insignificant. In fact it is characteristic of the intensification of activities that Hungary's competent authorities conducted investigations against 53 intelligence agents in 1953, 162 agents in 1955; in 1955 and 1956, 15 major and 30 minor hostile organizations were detected and dealt with by the Hungarian state security organs and 40 spies were arrested in the first half of 1956.

The data listed above can be supplemented by others: during the three years that followed the 1956 counter-revolution 26 hostile organizations were detected. Many of their members had been engaged in subversive underground activities for 8 to 10 years and earlier they were parties to other organizational activities. It is also noteworthy that 10 of the 20 underground organizations whose activities were ended in 1960 and 1961 had existed and had been active before 1956. Finally a comparison of the data about the exposed underground organizations provides evidence to the effect that some 250 smaller or major underground organizations participated in preparing and triggering off the armed uprising.

The domestic social basis of imperialist intervention was made up of the classes of exploiters who had been deprived of their power and property (capitalists, landowners and kulaks or rich peasants), the social strata that had served the former category (army officers, policemen and gendarmes of the previous regime and other groups of the oppressive Horthy apparatus) and other incorrigible fascist elements. They hated people's power, most of them were not only too eager to avail themselves of any favourable opportunity to attack workers' power, but took advantage of every opportunity to prepare and organize for an armed revolt, for an attempt to regain political power.

Study of the experiences gained in combating the hostile underground movements showed them as sharing three general characteristics. In the immediate wake of their loss of power they began, in 1949 and 1950, to embark on underground organizational activities with the aim of regaining

power. Their tactical and strategic guidelines came from international imperialist organizations. A specific division of labour evolved between the organizations. They adopted different methods and tactics and worked in different environments for the accomplishment of essentially identical objectives.

Among the domestic organizations the most important area of activity was that of *military, armed subversion*. Expolicemen, gendarmes and army officers of the Horthy regime and the fascist Arrow Cross provided the basis of these organizations. But their ranks also included public servants of the Horthy regime and kulaks. The most significant organizations were the following: *Kard és Kereszt* (Sword and Cross), *Fehér Gárda* (White Guard), *Botond Hadosztály* (Botond Division), *Hadapródok Szervezete* (Cadets' Organization) all of which had been established under the influence of the Fraternal Association of Hungarian Fighters. Others like *Fehér Partizánok* (White Partisans), *Vérszerződés* (Contract Sealed with Blood), *Magyar Ellenállási Mozgalom* (Hungarian Resistance Movement), *Nemzeti Ellenállási Mozgalom* (National Resistance Movement) operated as "independent" organizations. They were active on the basis of general political and military instructions transmitted by Radio Free Europe. The most important instructions were relayed by liaison officers. Let us take a few examples to illustrate their operational principles.

Fehér Partizánok (White Partisans) was established in 1950 by József Fiala, a political detective of the Horthy regime and his companions with a network extending over a large part of Hungary. Some of its members had arms, and it had groups composed of experts of local administration, a group for women, etc. Their plans were based on a future war and the expectation that American armed forces would come to Hungary. Their activities, planned in relation to an "invasion" of Hungary, included selection of airfields and other suitable landing areas for American and British transport planes and paratroopers. Personal documents in English and armbands were prepared in readiness for the occasion. Most of the members were exposed when the organiza-

tion was broken up in October 1954, but those who escaped reorganized themselves and as from the middle of 1955 relied on the fundamental principles of "liberation policy".²⁶

Hadapródok Szervezete (Cadets' Organization) was active between 1949 and December 1955. "As a student of a former cadet school I considered it to be my duty in the then international situation to establish an anti-state organization" — this was stated by Jenő Sulyánszky, the leader of the organization, in his confession in court. The Cadets' Organization had drawn up two plans: one for the outbreak of a new war and the other for the situation following the departure of Soviet troops from Hungary. Its members had blueprinted the occupation of the Hungarian Radio building, seizure of arsenals, and the release of political prisoners. The groups of the Organization included an intelligence unit and those in charge of placement, acquiring motor vehicles and making forged documents. In 1955, it staged an exercise designed to intensify fighting spirit. The plan of the exercise which had been elaborated in advance contained details of the manner in which public buildings were to be occupied.

The Cadets' Organization was also engaged in espionage activities. The information its members obtained was forwarded by György Désaknay, a liaison officer of Radio Free Europe. He encouraged the members to draw up plans for possible disturbances in Hungary. In response, Sulyánszky and his companions elaborated what they described the "Szeged Plan". Its essence was to organize a revolt in the southern city of Szeged and initiate counter-revolutionary moves elsewhere in Hungary. In case of failure they planned to leave Hungary for Yugoslavia.²⁷

The *Botond Hadosztály* (Botond Division) was made up of three independent organizations led by Károly Gajári, Lajos Bónis and Ottmár Faddi. These three leaders coordinated their ideas and the activities of their respective organizations. They had elaborated plans for establishing a

²⁶Budapest Court of Justice. B. I. 005 021/1955.

²⁷Budapest Court of Justice. B. I. 006 039/1956/II.

provisional "Civil Guard", following take-over, a special court to try Hungary's leading officials and to prosecute progressives. A copy of their programme was sent to the *Magyar Nemzeti Bizottmány* (Hungarian National Committee) operating in Western Europe.

István Szelepcsényi, sentenced with 11 others in April 1950 for the crime of illegal organizational activities, established an organization while serving his prison term, the *Magyar Ellenállási Mozgalom* (Hungarian Resistance Movement). It trained its members to organize underground groups in their localities, following release from prison. One of his accomplices organized a group at Berettyóújfalu, south-eastern Hungary. The group carried on underground activities continuously for ten years and showed up at the right spot the moment armed fighting broke out.²⁸ For example, Szelepcsényi was fighting in the counter-revolutionary group active in Budapest in *Maros utca* and after October 28, 1956, he became one of the leaders of the armed "National Guards" in the village of Nagykovácsi some 7 miles west of Budapest.

The establishment of the Budapest branch and the local organization in Békés County of the so-called *Nemzeti Ellenállási Mozgalom* (National Resistance Movement) is an indication of the influence exerted by Operation FOCUS of Radio Free Europe. The branch in the Hungarian capital city developed the method of arming its members and compiled a "black list" of persons to be assassinated. Meanwhile, the branch of the National Resistance Movement in the village of Békéssámson managed to dominate the local civil defence organization and could thus train its members in handling arms and held shooting exercises.

István Doma and his companions also began to train themselves in the methods of struggle to overthrow the people's democratic state. Their planning specialized in the occupation of post offices and of the Hungarian radio building. Under the cover name of "Zugló I" their group operating in the József district international telephone exchange

²⁸Budapest Military Tribunal. B. II. Kt. 047/1959.

planned to take control of the international telephone lines. They extended their organization to the provinces as well.²⁹

It is quite clear from this far from complete list of examples that hostile elements were determined to plan and prepare to overthrow workers' power with arms.

The other major area of illegal counter-revolutionary activities was that of groupings and organizational activities of a political nature. Former bourgeois politicians and those of the "Christian" parties and petty bourgeois liberal forces established their groups within a loose framework in preparation for taking over. Some of them operated within a relatively regular organizational form, others convened their members only occasionally to discuss the situation or to draw up programmes which were, as a rule, concerned with keeping the idea of a multi-party system alive and favoured neutrality which was often referred to as the "third path". Most of these groupings agreed with the activities of the group led by Imre Nagy.

The right-wing leaders of the former Smallholders' Party were in touch with one another regularly. They had debating sessions and embraced the petty bourgeois idea of neutrality. They also sought ties with Imre Nagy. One group from the Smallholders' Party headed by Dr. György Lupkovics elaborated a separate programme under the title "Non-Party People's Opinion".

The former right-wing leaders of the Peasant Party also found ways and means of maintaining ties and propagating their views. There was also a revival in the activities of the former right-wing leaders of the Social Democratic Party. One of their groups was busy with organizational activities and its members established what they called *Spartacus Szabad Szociáldemokraták Szövetsége* (Association of the Spartacus Free Social Democrats). It sent its 13 point programme to the editors of *Irodalmi Újság* (Literary Gazette).

The active elements of the former Democratic People's Party also fostered the idea of a "bourgeois democratic" state. Several smaller groups made preparations for the op-

²⁹Budapest Court of Justice. B. I. 005 002/1955.

portunity to found political parties in the event of a successful armed uprising. One of these, led by Gyula Olasz, made preparations to establish the *Keresztény Demokrata Párt* (Christian Democratic Party) as from 1953. The programme and the party rules were elaborated in advance.

Some armed organizations had special groups entrusted with the job of organizing parties. The *Fehér Partizánok* (White Partisans), for example, decided to found a party under the name *Szeretet Párt* (Party of Love) in the event of an uprising gaining the day.

Self-styled ideologist István Péntek brought together his fascist comrades. He was released from prison in 1954 and from then onwards engaged in organizational activities among former political prisoners. This is what one of his accomplices, Áron Csóri, had to say in his testimony: "The political objective of the organization was to implement the so-called national communism and a confederation of the nations in the Danube Valley in an attempt to separate Hungary from Moscow." This organization also rallied around the group headed by Imre Nagy.³⁰

The Christian Party which was established in 1950 was perhaps the most dangerous of the illegal organizations. The leaders of the party were tried in 1957 and 1961. The verdict was quite justified in stating: "Regarding its objective this organization revealed no essential differences compared to other underground organizations directed against the state, but its propaganda was different from that of the others. Under the pretext of practising religion it wanted to turn religious people through their religious beliefs against our people's democratic state, win them over to the party's side, and persuade them to participate in illegal organizational activities."³¹

The Christian Party considered the organization of young people as its major task. The party's leadership directed an illegal youth movement of the church. Organization began between 1949 and 1951 on the initiative of some priests and

monks who were active practically non-stop up to 1959 or 1960. Of the many youth organizations mention must be made of the *Maria Congregatio* which was composed of former monks of the Cistercian Order, the youth organization of the Christian Party which was founded in 1950, and *Regnum Marianum*, which was re-established in 1951.

The youth movement of the church which embraced organizations bearing different names but completely identical in terms of their views were led by experienced former monks. Their activities covered the whole of Hungary.

The *Keresztény Front* (Christian Front), which coordinated the organizations operating under the auspices of the church, had some 800 activists and was divided into 12 groups each of which was subdivided into smaller groups. The leader of the Front, Géza Havasi admitted: "The goal of our organization before 1956 was to train an elite from young people which, in the event of a change in the system, would be able to play a leading role in Christian society and to have leaders ready to hand if a favourable opportunity presented itself following the overthrow of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

The operations of *Maria Congregatio* were conducted by a four-member illegal council of a religious order. They were, at the same time, the leaders in four principal regions: those of Budapest, Székesfehérvár, Győr and Eger.

Regnum Marianum was composed of 19 main groups. Its branches and sub-groups covered the whole of Hungary. Recruits were trained in leadership courses. For example, in the *Maria Congregatio* some 50 to 60 students of the final grade of the secondary school were sent to attend a half year course in 1949. *Regnum Marianum* ran annual training courses for future leaders.

The youth movement of the church organized and "educated" young people from those aged 8–10 and 24–25. Its agents were particularly active in the ranks of secondary school students and those of higher educational institutions. Group members were assigned the task of spreading their views in the course of discussions and debates with their school-mates and to behave as befitting people belonging to

³⁰Budapest Court of Justice. T. B. 9006/1959.

³¹Budapest Court of Justice. T. B. XVI. 9220; 9228; 9264/1961.

the elite. A total of 6,000 to 8,000 young people were under the direct guidance of the groups and they exerted an influence on thousands of their fellow-students.

One of the leaders of *Regnum Marianum*, László Emödy, confessed to the court: "As a rule, we brought into our group people we knew to be opposed to the regime or who displayed a passive attitude."

Defendant Kölley admitted: "The goal was to rally young people from the middle class, to bring about an elite in order to use them in case of an eventual change of regime."

The cardinal objective of *Regnum Marianum* was "to make people aware, in addition to giving religious instruction, of the fact that the people's democratic order was of a provisional nature". László Emödy elaborated the rules of the organization in 1954 accordingly.

The people and organizations listed above did not organize groups for an armed uprising; they expected it to be staged by others. But they did not deny that "the political education of groups of young people was directed before 1956 to make them oppose the system... in the spirit of the programme of the Christian Front and in the interest of implementing a Christian social order".

They held lectures and published brochures in an effort to propagate their ideas. In a brochure entitled *Kiáltás férfiak után* ("A Cry for Men") the authors prepared young people to fight and to embark on destructive activities: "...the time shall come when you shall be given the following commands from God on high: YOU SHALL WIPE OUT, DESTROY, DEVASTATE!... It shall be a bloodless revolution, the one of quality..." Their illegal periodical named *Mustármag* (Mustard Seed) launched a crusade against the Soviet Union. "In the Carpathian Basin we are the only cultured nation respecting the Virgin Mary. We stand at the gate to the East and the conversion of Bolshevik Russia must also start from our country."

Some of the brochures were printed by the organizations themselves; others were received from abroad. Endre Földy, the ideologist of the Christian Front, produced about 60 different types of brochures between 1952 and 1960 in over

600 copies and spent some 30,000 Forints on their publication.

The organizations led by ex-monks obtained substantial financial assistance through their contacts. The Christian Front received 130,000 Forints, *Maria Congregatio* got 75,000 Forints in 1951, 75,000 in 1954, 30,000 in 1955 and 90,000 in November, 1956. When it was uncovered, *Regnum Marianum* possessed 258,230 Forints, 45 twenty gold francs, 67 typewriters, 12 tape recorders, cutting and printing facilities.

The question arises whether or not there was a centre in Hungary which was coordinating the multifarious and very diverse illegal organizations hostile to the system. The evidence suggests that such a centre did not operate within the country. The Radio Free Europe Committee and the institutions affiliated to it played the role of the "popular resistance centre". Internal organized resistance was guided from outside Hungary with the assistance of spies, diplomats, agents and couriers and through the programmes and messages transmitted by Radio Free Europe. Two-thirds of the organizations uncovered had direct foreign links.

However, despite the resources and forces of the domestic enemy listed in the foregoing, Operation FOCUS was brought to a standstill in the summer of 1955 and its first phase ended. Its chief organizers saw the Geneva summit and the easing of international tension as a tragedy for the campaign, a view shared by R. T. Holt. They were also disturbed by the fact that the Hungarian Working People's Party took action against right-wing revisionism in the spring of 1955.

In September 1955, the Crusade for Freedom, an organization whose independence of governments was invariably emphasized, acquired a new leader in the person of W. William, the US Secretary of Commerce. His appointment meant that a high-ranking official of the United States Administration openly emerged at the head of the "Crusade". The new director general was greeted in a letter by President Dwight Eisenhower in which he confirmed that the position of his Administration continued to be the "liberation of enslaved peoples", and that it would give every assistance to the organization which "organized and built up the spirit of resistance in the countries behind the Iron Curtain".

The Second Phase of Operation FOCUS (1956)

4.1. The Bankruptcy of the Dogmatic Leadership of the Party

By the end of 1955 contradictions had accumulated in Hungary's social and economic life. The declared intention to conduct a principled struggle against revisionism had degenerated into the taking of administrative measures, the rehabilitation of comrades, victims of illegality had been brought to a halt, compulsory delivery quotas had been increased considerably, taxes had been collected twice a year, and so on.

A group of writers had drawn up a memorandum which was circulated within a restricted circle in the autumn of 1955. It raised objections to the "detrimental use of force, unjustified administrative interference and the return to methods of giving commands" which were described as gaining ground again in society, especially in the cultural sphere. The authors of the document cited outstanding examples of what they had in mind, such as the confiscation of papers, replacement of cultural officials, banning of certain plays, and so on. Instead of examining the essence of these criticisms, the party leadership cracked down on the writers involved. Administrative measures were adopted which immediately resulted in an aura of glory for the writers who had the courage to display "resistance", although their overwhelming majority had been only too loyal earlier. That was how the hardly known memorandum was elevated to the status of a glamorous "writers' revolt".

The rapid and repeated re-evaluation of the policies pursued by the Hungarian Working People's Party, the tug-of-war in its leadership, the disclosure of mistakes and the

committing of new errors undermined confidence in the party and induced among honest people a feeling that there was no way out of the political impasse. Under such conditions the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which took place from February 14 to 25 had a profound effect on Hungarian public opinion. Interest in politics had become quite general, people read and discussed the documents of the Congress. "The Main Report to the Congress was considered a brilliant example of the application of creative Marxism." In the first survey of public mood it was also reported: "following the Twentieth Congress people gave a sigh of relief".³²

Hungarian working people read the open criticism of the personality cult and the related observations on Leninist principles with satisfaction. The Communists derived fresh inspiration from the restoration of the Leninist norms of party life. In the factories the workers offered pledges to produce more in honour of the Congress.

In places, however, criticism was also voiced, certain statements and speeches made at the Congress led to uncertainty, fear and a lack of understanding on the part of some party members, first of all, party officials. At once misinterpretation and self-justification appeared, and there developed an atmosphere of backbiting. The time had come for Hungarian Communists to take a frank and unified position.

"The position which the party leaders would take on certain issues of Hungary's situation and development in the wake of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union" was a matter of general expectation. At well-attended meetings there was a general demand that "the leaders rely more intensively on the rank and file and consult them frankly about the day-to-day matters of the country".³³ Letters containing proposals were sent to the

³²PI Archives 276/9-56/1956. Records of the principal experiences gained at the county meetings of party activists. March 30, 1956.

³³PI Archives 276/9-32/1956. Records of the experiences gained by party instructors. Party and Mass Communication Department of the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party, March 8, 1956, 1/7-8. 1956/2 issue.

central institutions. The letter-writers demanded that the spirit of the Congress be applied in Hungary. It was a general desire that the lessons to be drawn from the Congress in Hungary be discussed by the press. Articles and comments were sent to editorial offices of the daily papers and periodicals in the spirit of the ideas voiced at the Twentieth Congress. The party's central paper and theoretical periodical emphasized the immense significance of the Congress and singled out as the main task the application of the lessons to be drawn from the Congress. On this basis party life was revitalized and the activity of the membership intensified.

The fact that over 30,000 written comments and observations were sent in from May to July 1956 containing proposals for the modification of the draft of the Second Five Year Plan is a proof of the positive nature of the increasing social activity. There was a tremendous increase in the number of letters sent to the central organs of the party as well. The party's central daily received an average of 3,533 letters a month in 1955. The corresponding figure rose to 4,426 between January and May, 1956, and to 6,448 between June and September. In the early months of 1956, 15 to 20 per cent of the letters voiced sharp criticism of uncertain leadership, condemned red tape and obstacles to increased production. The corresponding figures for July are 28-30, and for September and October 38-40 per cent. The letter-writers made useful proposals and requested that "the Central Leadership of the party speak to the working people in a manner that befits adults".

Early 1956 another opportunity presented itself to correct the erroneous policy and to impart a new impetus to the building of socialism under the leadership of the party. However, instead of a positive trend the events developed in such a way that on October 23, 1956, an armed uprising broke out, aimed at overthrowing the people's democratic system. This tragic transformation of the situation was brought about by a variety of factors which, while very different, combined to push developments in one direction.

At its meeting of March 12-13, 1956, the Central Leader-

ship considered what lessons the resolutions adopted by the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union might have for Hungary. Dominated by Rákosi and Gerő, the leadership continued the political game designed to cover up the errors and avoid responsibility. Despite a heated debate, the group led by Rákosi managed to have its position accepted according to which everything was in good order in Hungary, the errors had been eliminated and the political situation was good. Rákosi was only too firm in stating that "in the course of the analysis of the Twentieth Congress we concluded that the main line of our party is correct in every respect... our party is strong and united. Our national economy is soundly based".³⁴

All this revealed that the party leadership was incapable of taking advantage of the valuable aid the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union represented for the international Communist movement. The situation had become critical.

The workers made innumerable complaints about mismanagement in production. They repeatedly drew attention to how an inadequate supply of materials rendered systematic production impossible, disorganization prevented continuous work, and excessive bureaucracy drowned production in a sea of papers and documents. There were increasing complaints about wages. There were deficiencies in the availability of bread and lard, mainly in the provincial towns and there were great difficulties in general in the supply of consumer goods. Because of the economic conditions people did not put much trust in party statements on other issues.

Disillusionment assumed nationwide dimensions. The overwhelming majority of party officials were as indignant as the general public over the "light-hearted" superficiality of leadership divorced from reality, and the aristocratic manner in which the demands of the masses were ignored and their experiences dismissed as irrelevant. It was openly recognized in the information materials prepared for the

³⁴*Szabad Nép* (Free People), March 15, 1956.

leading bodies that the report given by the party leadership and the resolutions adopted at the Central Leadership meeting had failed to live up to the expectations developed following the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The people expected much more...

The rank and file of the party demanded the renewal of the leadership saying "there has been enough of self-criticism, we now need leaders who have a better understanding of the issues at stake".³⁵ The party activists called for the return of such popular leaders as János Kádár, Gyula Kállai, Árpád Szakasits, György Marosán and other comrades who had been replaced earlier. They also demanded that rehabilitation be carried on and completed.

Radio Free Europe began transmitting the report discussing Stalin's activity which was presented to a closed session at the Twentieth Congress in the second half of March. Leaflets reproducing the report were dropped over Hungary from carrier-balloons. Meanwhile, the party leadership remained silent about the report. This brought new disquiet and a fresh shock to the party rank and file.

By that time it had gradually become quite obvious for a substantial body of party opinion that Mátyás Rákosi was incapable of understanding the new demands, of recognizing the necessity for radical change. A swelling volume of criticism was directed at Rákosi and other party leaders for their errors and the delays in rectifying them. It became evident that Rákosi was the main obstacle to new policies.

³⁵PI Archives 276/9-42/1956. Information on the reaction to the March resolution of the Central Leadership and to the report given by Comrade Rákosi on March 17, 1956. (The information was obtained from the VIIth, IXth and XIIth Districts of Budapest, from the workshops and plants of MÁVAG factory, the Automobile Trust, the Hungarian Radio and the Klement Gottwald factory.)

4.2. The Group of Imre Nagy Organizes Itself into Party Opposition

The political impotence of the party leaders, their ambiguous and insincere positions led to increasingly bitter debate, intense polarization and growing uncertainty within the party. Obvious differences of opinion on the situation in Hungary and the nature of the lessons of the Twentieth Congress were discernible in the party press and organizations. In the spring and summer of 1956, different tendencies within the party began to merge around Imre Nagy. The outlines of an organized party opposition with the name of Imre Nagy figuring on its banner began to take perceptible shape.

Imre Nagy commanded respect among ordinary people, mainly among the peasants and fairly large groups of intellectuals. He derived a good deal of popularity from the fact that as Prime Minister in 1953, he was the first public figure to speak about the errors disclosed by the Central Leadership. He became associated in the public mind with the promise of new policies and measures. From then onwards he posed as the champion of legality.

The conscious elements of opposition inside the party rallied around Imre Nagy not by sheer coincidence. In addition to his popularity they were attracted, to a certain extent, by the fact that Imre Nagy had been criticized several times by the party leadership for his petty bourgeois opportunism and right-wing views. In 1948 and 1949, his views on the concept of People's Democracy and on important issues of peasant policy had provoked debates for the first time since 1945, the year of Hungary's liberation from fascist rule. At the time he admitted to having taken an opportunist position on the issues in question. In September 1949, he declared before the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party, "In connection with my right-wing opportunist deviation I want to declare that I accept the proposal submitted by the Political Committee to the Central Leadership." Then he pledged, "I will overcome the

mistakes manifested in both my theoretical activities and in my attitude".³⁶

In a matter of a few years, actually in March 1955, the right-wing revisionist views and opportunist attitude that had caused serious damage and because of which he was replaced as Prime Minister and expelled from the Central Leadership, were severely criticized. In his letter of May 4, 1955, addressed to the Central Leadership he practised self-criticism again and pledged: "I will support the party with all my powers and I will be in the forefront of the struggle for the elimination of any intention or endeavour, wherever it might come from, which is designed to take advantage of my anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist right-wing errors for loosening or disrupting the party's organizational unity and discipline or objectives running counter to the interests of our People's Republic and socialist construction..."³⁷

In actual fact the core of the group or faction led by Imre Nagy evolved in the months that followed and began to act in an organized way first of all in the domain of literature and the arts. As a result, the Central Leadership expelled Imre Nagy from the party in November 1955.

However, while taking these administrative measures against him, the Rákosi leadership was quite incapable of countering Imre Nagy's incorrect views in open, principled ideological struggle. At the same time as the party leadership repeated its errors, the conviction grew that without Imre Nagy it would be impossible to find a solution to the critical situation. His supporters worked to strengthen and spread this impression.

The Imre Nagy—Géza Losonczy group propagated showy slogans. They spoke of a "better socialism", the "purification of democracy" and some of their followers did not in fact want more than that. The group pursued its agitation to arouse indignation and dissatisfaction. Because this was combined with stress on the very issues causing main disillusionment, it was difficult to recognize for what

³⁶*Népszabadság*, May 9, 1957.

³⁷*Ibid.*

it was—manipulative agitation for false goals. The group clearly recognized the immense popularity of the ideas of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the working peoples' expectation of new measures. They constantly cited the Congress and its achievements using these references to cloak their real views and ambitions. They tried to establish a monopoly in the application of the ideas of the Twentieth Congress. They claimed to be the only people with a correct interpretation of those ideas and the only people capable of translating them into Hungarian practice.

What made Imre Nagy the leader of the opposition was the fact that he could outline a programme to back up the activities of the group he headed. At the end of 1955 and in the early months of 1956 he wrote several studies which he discussed with his followers. The final versions were distributed illegally.³⁸

These studies by Imre Nagy provided the basic principles for the activities of the opposition group. While emphasizing his loyalty to socialism, he revised its most important theoretical foundations.

Whenever he dealt with the question of the nature of state power, he always denied in some form or another the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Hungary. In 1947, he considered People's Democracy a form of power, of which, "in contrast to Western democracy, it is characteristic that power is in the hands of the working people and not of the capitalists, and the alliance of the workers and peasants serves as the basis of this democratic power".³⁹ In 1949, he maintained that People's Democracy was a version of capitalism (state capitalism) as against "unlimited" capitalism and he admitted in his self-criticism that "I regarded

³⁸After the counter-revolution had been crushed, the studies by Imre Nagy were smuggled to the West and published in 1957 under the title *A magyar nép védelmében* (In Defence of the Hungarian People).

³⁹Imre Nagy: *Egy évtized. Válogatott beszédek és írások, I* (A Decade. Selected Speeches and Writings, I), Szikra, Budapest 1954, Vol. I, p. 380.

the national economy of People's Democracy as state capitalism".⁴⁰

In a study compiled in preparation for the Third Congress of the Hungarian Working People's Party in 1954, he wrote of the system of People's Democracy: "In Hungary, the peaceful tasks of building, organization and cultural activities come much more into the fore than the main functions of the people's democratic state which are incompatible in the long run with the function of state power founded upon revolutionary force."⁴¹ In this way Nagy denied what is absolutely necessary to defend peaceful construction against the repeated onslaughts from the domestic and external enemy.

By abandoning his class position he denied the leading role of the working class. Contrasting working-class interests with the universal interests of the nation, he did not deny that he gave priority to the so-called universal national interests. He gave these interests priority because "the working class... cannot subordinate the nation's universal interests to its own class interests". In his opinion the peasantry constituted the fundamental class in society; he meant this in general terms without taking into account the stratification of peasantry. He told a national meeting of model farmers on September 8, 1948: "The peasantry is eternal like the work that ensures man's existence".

It stems from the exaggeration of national aspects and a petty bourgeois approach that Nagy revised the most important general laws of the building of socialism. Thus, for example, instead of the socialist transformation of agriculture he gave another programme: "...the welfare of the middle peasants, their economic prosperity and increase in their production... are indispensable for the rapid elimination of the backwardness of our agriculture".

Imre Nagy took a non-Marxist position in the historic

⁴⁰ *Jobboldali nézetektől az osztályárulásig* (From Right-Wing Views to Class Betrayal). [Addition to the Theoretical and Practical Activities of Imre Nagy and His Group, 1947-1956]. Manuscript, 1957.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

century-long debate on bourgeois democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Despite frequent references to Leninist ideas, Nagy abhorred the dictatorship of the proletariat and its class content like a petty bourgeois philistine. Nagy's emphasis on "universal national interests", the "fundamental principles of national existence" as well as his other petty bourgeois and nationalist views were made to appear particularly radical and militant by the frequently recurring sharp criticisms of Stalinist dogma.

His revisionism was easier to detect in that volume of Imre Nagy's memoirs which discusses foreign policy issues. In place of the unity of the socialist countries and their joining of forces on the basis of proletarian internationalism, the alternative Imre Nagy recommended as the fundamental principle of peaceful coexistence was to limit their ties. "The five fundamental principles of peaceful coexistence", he wrote "cannot be confined to the capitalist system or to the struggle between the two systems; it must be extended to the relations between the group of democratic-socialist countries. The five fundamental principles do not arise from and are not reflected by conflicts between the two systems, between capitalism and socialism, but they are factors in the mutual relations of nations independent of social and political systems."

Nagy clearly formulated a programme for breaking away from the fraternal community of the socialist countries, above all, from the Soviet Union: "For small countries like Hungary it is a question of vital importance to correctly define their position in the field of relations between states... It is important for Hungary to avoid becoming an active participant in the clash of power blocs..."

For Imre Nagy the existence of the two opposing world systems as well as the major role of socialism in world history no longer meant anything. Nagy equated the two social systems as power blocs of a similar nature, and thought only in terms of small nations opposed to big powers. This is how he formulated the conditions which he believed to be ideal: "Coordinated foreign policy and cooperation between the progressive democratic and socialist countries or those of a

similar type endorsing the five fundamental principles,⁴² based on neutrality or active coexistence, appears to be the most expedient course to adopt as against the policies of power blocs. This path is facilitated for Hungary by her geographic position—in the neighbourhood of neutral Austria, and of countries engaged in socialist construction...

"What Lajos Kossuth had in mind to ensure the independent, sovereign, autonomous and free national existence of the Hungarians was not the joining of some big power or power group, but close cooperation with the neighbouring peoples in the frame of an alliance of equal footing (confederation) of free peoples. These are the ideas to which we have to return."

This programme clearly contains the destruction of the unity and alliance of the socialist countries and confrontation of the European people's democratic countries with the Soviet Union. What Imre Nagy had to offer Hungary was political adventurism, manoeuvring between East and West instead of the fraternal joining of forces, the honest attitude of an ally based on socialist principles and friendship with the neighbouring peoples. His views were wrapped up in the "ideas of Lajos Kossuth", concealing their real nature behind the greatness, authority and immense popularity of the Kossuth heritage. He was convinced that it was possible for Hungary to break away from the world system of socialist countries because, as he put it, "at the moment Hungary is the weakest link in the chain of the socialist community of nations".

Imre Nagy's views were essentially identical with the programme suggested and transmitted by the organs of international imperialism. This programme has not lost any of its influence on certain political circles even after a decade. While the drawing of parallels is something that can mislead, we can safely state that the Czechoslovak nationalist-

⁴²According to the periodical of the Imre Nagy Institute in Brussels, this part of the sentence runs: "countries with different systems sharing the five fundamental principles..." (*Szemle [Review]*), Brussels, January 1960.)

revisionist forces of 1968, or to use the old-new term, the advocates of "democratic socialism", used Imre Nagy as their cardinal argument. Osvald Machatka, journalist and diplomat, commemorated Imre Nagy in the Czechoslovak literary paper *Literární Listy* on June 13, 1968, in an article entitled "Another Anniversary". Marking the tenth anniversary of the sentence imposed on Nagy for his counter-revolutionary crimes, the article appeared following the May 1968 session of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party when the party had already launched its campaign against right-wing revisionism. Written in opposition to the party's campaign, it argued the timeliness of Imre Nagy's political platform. Machatka wrote: "With his criticism of totalitarian dictatorship and his humanist interpretation of socialism, Nagy emerged as the outstanding representative of the democratic and national principle of socialism." The author endorsed Imre Nagy's idea that "it is a guarantee of independence to stay out of military blocs, to be neutral" as a foreign policy programme.

Imre Nagy "was convinced of the necessity of several political parties", and to this end "he maintained relations with democratic and socialist politicians".⁴³ In his testimony of July 30, 1957, Géza Losonczy admitted that they had negotiated with right-wing representatives of the former Smallholders' Party and Social Democrats. In the summer of 1956, he met personally with Anna Kéthly, a prominent representative of the right-wing Social Democrats. During the meeting, in a flat in *Pozsonyi út*, Budapest, there was agreement on the necessity of replacing the leading role of the Communists' by a coalition government. Losonczy pledged that "in a possible forthcoming government led by Imre Nagy the majority of the coalition forces would be employed".

In his testimony he also admitted that "we preferred to rely even on right-wing Social Democrats against Stalinism... in an effort to push our hated enemies out of the party leadership".⁴⁴

⁴³*Szemle*, Brussels, April 1960.

⁴⁴BM (Ministry of the Interior), V-150-004. Minutes, July 30, 1957.

Imre Nagy regularly coordinated his views with the members of his group: they discussed the articles to be written and the speeches to be made. One of the demonstrative events of their organizing activities directed against the party was Imre Nagy's birthday dinner in June 1956. Attended by many persons including elements who were commonly known to be opposed to the party, this dinner gathering became a demonstration against party policy and in support of Imre Nagy.

The *Petőfi Kör* (Petőfi Club), established at the end of 1955 by the Budapest Committee of the Association of Working Youth as a forum of debate for young intellectuals, played an important role in the propaganda activities of the group headed by Imre Nagy. Throughout the first half of 1956, the Petőfi Club was virtually directed by Imre Nagy's group through some of the circle's leaders. Addressing the meetings of the Club, they discussed and propagated certain parts of their programme.

At the press debate held on June 27, 1956 and conducted by Géza Losonczy in the Petőfi Club, a complete action programme was declared. The essence of the principal points was that the root of all difficulties lay in the social system and its ideology. "It is quite obvious... that structural errors are responsible for our present often difficult, even miserable state," said the writer Tibor Déry. "As long as the emphasis is on criticizing people and erroneous political practice and not on adopting rigorous Marxist—Leninist methods to analyze whether or not the errors lie in our ideological approach, we can never achieve more than the trivial result of replacing a greater evil by a lesser evil."

Addressing youth he recalled the 1848 revolution and urged them to act: "...I say that I have confidence in youth. I ask the youth, the Hungarian young people not to forget their predecessors, the Youth of March. That is how we described the youth of 1848; I would very much like, comrades, if we had a youth of 1956 assisting the nation in conquering the future."

The faction of Nagy overtly advocated the formation of a group within the party. Tibor Tardos expressed this idea:

"We are the party, our steadily increasing group, we who hold high as our banner the ideals and philanthropic principles of humanism."⁴⁵

4.3. Preparations for a Coordinated Attack

The development of anti-party organizational activities and mounting political tension called the attention of international imperialism to Hungary. The domestic situation was considered to be suitable for placing subversion in Hungary on a new basis. The signal for attack was again given by the government circles of the United States.

The then American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles received the committee of the so-called General Assembly of European Captive Nations in which the Hungarian National Commission was represented by György Bakács-Bessenyei. Following the meeting Lincoln White, the head of the Press Department of the American State Department, read a statement in which he underlined that this was the first occasion on which a Secretary of State had received a delegation of the Committee officially. He confirmed to its members that one of the principal objectives of American foreign policy continued to be the "liberation of captive nations".

The second phase of Operation FOCUS was introduced by "Special Instruction" No. 26 of the Radio Free Europe Committee. The first part of the "Instruction" dates from March 27, 1956, while the second one from April 7. The main lines of political attack were defined by the document.

1. Action with all means at disposal against "Stalinism" and continuous raising of new, provocative subjects which will throw oil on the flames.

2. Propagate with all possible means the idea that the "cult of personality is an inevitable product of the system

⁴⁵PI Archives. E. Gy. C-V-4. Minutes of the press debate of the Petőfi Club.

and, for that matter, the internal logic of its elimination demands that the system as a whole be revised".

3. All adherents of the "Free World" must be convinced that the attitude of America will not change and she will continue to stand ready to give assistance for "liberation".

The main task of the second phase was to make direct preparations for intervention. However, world public opinion forced the imperialists to speak of "peaceful liberation" without war, but this really meant: the preparation of revolt!

One of the studies written in preparation for action posed the following question: "How can we get rid of the present regime without war?" Three options were offered in reply. "In theory, for example", R. T. Holt writes, "it is possible that one of the present regime people might carry out a successful Titoist coup, a 'palace revolution'. Such independence from Moscow might possibly become the first step toward democracy... Then, there is another theoretical possibility that the present regime might be swept away at one stroke by a sudden popular rising. No doubt the idea of such a revolution has great appeal among us... Finally, there are still other possibilities, such as, for instance, free elections under international control, or disintegration of the regime by factional struggle—or possibly as a corollary to gradual disintegration of the Soviet power—or perhaps other alternatives which at present no one can foresee." The following was considered to be most important of all: "In its final stages a favourable international situation would, of course, represent the indispensable prerequisite permitting the people to deal with the regime without intervention from Moscow."⁴⁶

Early in 1956, reactionary Hungarian emigrés also launched a debate around the question of new tactics. They also made it clear that "a solution by war is an uncertain factor; it can and must be reckoned with, but it should be omitted from our real plans. Eastern Europe has come very much into the picture in psychological warfare and so there

⁴⁶R. T. Holt: *op. cit.*, pp. 225–226.

are new tasks ahead of us", this is what Imre Kovács wrote in the January–February 1956 issue of *Látóhatár* (Horizon), an emigré periodical. The new tasks included a) taking advantage of dissatisfaction and the uncertainty of leadership, b) winning over all opposition force, c) preparing the domestic reactionary forces for an uprising.

A new wave of balloons was launched with Hungary as their destination. In the first half of 1956, balloons were detected in Hungary's air space on 293 occasions. One of them caused a civil aviation disaster when an aircraft crashed with many passengers on board on July 19. At the time, a British journalist, John Adams visited the propaganda balloon centre of Radio Free Europe close to the Bavarian town of Freyung. On the average 500 balloons were launched per hour from the well-equipped base. One night Adams watched the launching of some three thousand balloons. He was told that a 32 page mini-paper was also dispatched in two million copies fortnightly. The 1955 Christmas message of Dwight Eisenhower, which was mentioned earlier, was dropped in the People's Democratic countries in some ten million copies.

Describing the atmosphere at the Radio Free Europe base, John Adams wrote that it resembled a prison camp with huge barbed wire fences, watch towers, search lights and uniformed guards who carefully examined identity papers while police dogs barked in the background.⁴⁷

On September 30, 1956, the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that Radio Free Europe Press had launched over 400,000 balloons containing some 300 million leaflets in the direction of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1954. The impact of the balloon campaign was summarized as follows by a counter-revolutionary who had made his escape to the West: "These balloons were very important to our psychological reactions. I remember thinking at the time: at last something tangible. Something other than words. If America could reach us with these aluminium medals, why should

⁴⁷*Truth*, May 4, 1956.

they not reach us with parachute supplies in the event of a revolution. Obviously, America intends to help us."⁴⁸

The political confusion within Hungary contributed to the growing interest taken in hostile propaganda, and the absence of information and failure to take a position allowed ample room for hostile agitation. A survey showed that "replies to problems and questions were only given in drips and drabs, and in many cases information was forthcoming earlier from the foreign press and radio stations than from the domestic papers or radio."⁴⁹

Radio Free Europe did not hesitate to take advantage of the opportunities. The principal objective of the psychological offensive was defined in its March 4 transmission, "...it must make its listeners increasingly aware that they are not alone, that the Free World is in solidarity with them, and considers their liberation as the guarantee and prerequisite of peace". On May 15, it was suggested that "peaceful liberation was possible without war", but for that it was indispensable to start internal action. "The more the Hungarians promote the loosening up of the Communist regime, the sooner the decisive day will come." As tensions mounted, resistance was encouraged on June 5: "...where concessions upset the structure of the regime at any point, the growing dissatisfaction can easily become dynamic... and can erupt."

In the struggle against "Stalinism" the propaganda organs of Operation FOCUS increasingly assumed the status of the spokesmen of Imre Nagy. Former party members and right-wing deviationists within the party were considered to be more suitable for increasing division within the party and conducting an attack on the party than the well-tested reactionaries who had already been exposed and discredited. On

⁴⁸J. A. Michener: *The Bridge at Andau*. Random House, New York 1957, pp. 251-252.

⁴⁹PI Archives. 276/9-68/1956. The impact of the Twentieth Congress and the March 12-13 meeting of the Central Leadership on engineers and teachers. Records by the Party and Mass Communication Department of the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party, April 2, 1956.

March 6, 1956, the Hungarian transmission of the BBC took as its starting point "the government of Imre Nagy and the new course is remembered by the people of the country as 18 months of hope". It was clear that Nagy was regarded as the best possible ally. On March 20, Radio Free Europe stated: "The problem of Imre Nagy has not yet been settled in Budapest. In vain did Rákosi denounce him in public, the events that have taken place increasingly prove Imre Nagy right." On May 9, Radio Free Europe stated: "Rákosi and his faction carry on with the old Stalinist policy. Hungary... is the only people's democracy that sabotages the enforcement of the new Moscow directives. Hungary lags behind the others in the implementation of the resolutions passed by the Twentieth Congress." And then came the refrain: only Imre Nagy is capable of implementing a policy that corresponds to the new situation.

The programme outlined at the "press debate" in the Petőfi Club on June 27 was greeted with satisfaction by the external backers of counter-revolution. Next day, June 28, their hopes rose even higher in the wake of the disturbances in the Polish city of Poznań.

Considerable dissatisfaction and bitterness had accumulated among Poznań workers over wages and supply problems. At workers' meetings reactionary elements whipped up an atmosphere that on June 28 led to a street demonstration. In the course of the demonstration actions by provocative and hooligan elements, who set fire to public buildings, led to shooting. The public security forces managed to restore order only after heavy clashes. An enthusiastic United States Senate, on hearing the news from Poznań acted immediately. On June 30 the *N. Y. Journal American* reported that as part of the foreign aid programme the Senate decided to appropriate 25 million dollars to finance those types of clandestine activities behind the "Iron Curtain" which led in Poznań to disturbances.

The imperialist circles stepped up propaganda trying to prove the world that the Poznań events were only the overture to an explosion that was also expected elsewhere. *The Sunday Times* wrote on July 1, 1956 that the Poznań events

were only the beginning. *Reynolds News* suggested that general despair in Hungary might well lead to an explosion there under the impact of the Poznań events.

Ferenc Fejtő, an expert of Hungarian origin at the French News Agency AFP, commented on July 1: "...an atmosphere of revolt is spreading in the ranks of students and professional people in the Hungarian capital city. This restless atmosphere appears to be crystallizing around the name of Imre Nagy, the ex-Prime Minister who was ousted from power in March 1955 under the pretext of being guilty of 'right-wing deviations'."

Reactionary emigrés thought that the time had come to consider the possibility of moving their "headquarters" to a location closer to Hungary. Ferenc Nagy, one of the leaders of the Hungarian National Commission, visited Austria in mid-July with a view to a transfer to Vienna or Salzburg. However, his proposal was rejected by Austria on grounds of that country's neutrality.

A week later the former right-wing Social Democratic leader Károly Peyer visited Vienna and in speaking to journalists revealed the "confidential" news that acting on instructions from the United States Government the Hungarian National Commission would move to Europe.

For this reason the monthly pay of the leaders had been increased from 400 to 700 dollars. Their new headquarters would be either Paris or a city in West Germany. While in Austria, Peyer visited the Austro-Hungarian border, too.

In the summer of 1956, Béla Varga and Zoltán Pfeiffer, two former bourgeois party leaders, also came over to Europe. The Hungarian service of Radio Rome evaluated their trip to Europe on July 17: "Hungarians living in the Free World have embarked on a major operation to obtain the foreign policy assistance necessary for the final move leading to the fall of the regime."

In its June 1956 issue the emigré periodical *Hadak Útján* (On Armies' Path) formulated the task as follows: "...the oppressed forces that are groping their way must be assisted with devotion, carefully and peacefully, forces that eventually come into the open behind a propaganda gesture like

removal of the technical facilities sealing the border between Hungary and Austria or the writers' revolt." In the March-April issue of *Látóhatár* (*Horizon*), Gyula Borbándi wrote "we have to attain a situation in which the Soviet Union withdraws its forces from our country and accepts Hungary's neutrality".

The domestic enemy also became more courageous. There was more overt criticism of people's power and agitation against "Jewish leadership". At the same time certain Zionist circles at home and abroad charged the leadership of the socialist countries in general with anti-Semitism, naming the Hungarian government among them.

"In the mining region around Ajka the sentiment was heard that the Communists had lost the game," and "we should also do something." "...there were also opinions voiced to the effect that it would be good to have armed action here, too."⁵⁰ In letters to Rome, László Sigmond, a leader of the youth movement led by priests and former monks, referred to in previous pages, reported on the activities of his organization.

In a letter dating from the summer of 1956 he described the prevailing reformist mood and drew the conclusion that a change of regime was to be expected. Another leader of the same movement, Pál Rosdy wrote to his elder brother living in the West that "Communist rule will soon end..."

4.4. The Situation before the Explosion

Under the influence of the erroneous policy and the increasing enemy activity there was a steady growth of dissatisfaction and indignation among working people. As a result, brief work stoppages occurred several times, workers frequently left their work places or staged protests. Strikes

⁵⁰PI Archives. 276/9-128/1956. Records for information purposes about some problems observable in the counties. Party and Mass Communication Department of the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party, June, 1956.

occurred in several factories in protest against low wages and the lack of organization. On July 2, 1956, the axle bushing plant of the Machine Tool Factory of the Csepel Iron and Steel Works (which was then the *Mátyás Rákosi* Works) staged a warning stoppage. The leadership of the party was given many warnings on different levels that "the implementation of the spirit of the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party was progressing at too slow a pace" and that "people were reluctant to follow automatically the Central Leadership". Concerning the disturbances in Poznań, the view was expressed that "there is fertile soil for a provocation of a similar kind in this country as well", and that an increase of workers' wages would help take the edge of the growing unrest.⁵¹

On June 30, the party's Central Leadership passed a resolution on the attack on party's policy and primarily on the debates conducted in the Petőfi Club. The resolution pointed out very correctly that the "actions taken against the party and People's Democracy were organized by a particular group which had grown up around Imre Nagy". The resolution correctly noted that members of the group "reckoning with the immense popularity of the Twentieth Congress and Marxist-Leninist ideas, posed as though they based themselves on the Twentieth Congress and Marxism—Leninism in a skilful cover up of their anti-party and anti-democratic views". The resolution pointed out that "hostile efforts to stir up trouble" had intensified. But this resolution was also one-sided. It welcomed the "fertile debates evolving in our party organizations", but failed to give guidance or to specify the correct direction in which discussion could move towards a solution to the serious problems. It correctly exposed the dangerous activities carried on by the revisionist party opposition, but failed to single out a path for the domestic implementation of the ideas of the

⁵¹PI Archives. 276/9-161/1956. Records for information purposes about the working people's opinion on the events in Poznań and in connection with the debate in the Petőfi Club. Party and Mass Communication Department, and the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party. July 12, 1956.

Twentieth Congress, the elimination of dogmatism and sectarianism and their grave consequences.

On July 1, Imre Nagy wrote to the Central Leadership rejecting that part of the resolution which referred to him. He defended his friends with whom he was "fighting shoulder to shoulder for the removal of the Stalinist ideological, political and methodological distortions of Marxism". He stated: "Both in public speeches and writings, my struggle for the free expression of my views is conducted in line with Lenin's ideas and principles. I refuse to deviate from those principles or to abandon them because I shall not allow myself to be excluded from political and social life." This letter was an open declaration of war.

In the grave situation Rákosi wanted to resort once again to administrative measures. He asked his most reliable followers to compile a list of suspicious persons with the idea of dealing with the problematic situation by excluding them from public life. In early July, rumours of the impending arrests of between 400 and 500 people circulated in Budapest.

However, there were not only dogmatists, sectarians and right-wing revisionists in the party. The genuine Leninists worked hard to have the ideas of the Twentieth Congress translated into practice in Hungary. They rejected the Imre Nagy programme and constituted the real opposition to the Rákosi leadership. Their ideas, the demands they put forward and their policy reckoned with the actual situation, and expressed the requirements of the working people. They waged their fight for these ideas in a manner corresponding to the party rules.

From July 18 to 21, 1956, the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party went into session again. Mátyás Rákosi was relieved of the post of First Secretary and Ernő Gerő was elected to replace him. Popular leaders commanding authority were brought into the Central Leadership and the Political Committee, such as Imre Horváth, János Kádár, Gyula Kállai, György Marosán, Imre Mező and others. The next day several members of the Central Leadership went out to factories to discuss the changes with

the workers. The workers appreciated this direct contact with the members of the Central Leadership.

Essentially, the programme adopted by the Central Leadership was correct, endeavouring to apply the ideas of the Twentieth Congress creatively. It disclosed and condemned the tug-of-war over the rehabilitation of the victims of violations of legality and set for agriculture and industry development tasks designed to ensure the raising of living standards. At the same time, it proposed immediate concrete measures to improve living conditions such as an end to registering for peace loan bonds, increasing old age pensions, reducing prices and improving the supply of consumer goods. Furthermore the resolution outlined and envisaged a development programme of greater democracy in state and party life, decentralization to give the working people a greater say, expansion of the scope of authority of parliament and municipal councils, and a greater role for the mass organizations. In its resolution the Central Leadership called for the strengthening of legality. The resolution condemned every kind of deviation from party policy, and called for simultaneous struggle on two fronts: "...care must be taken to avoid the use of empty formulas, and not to enter into debate about the relative strength of the right and left. In the present situation both constitute a grave danger: sometimes they are so intertwined that it is not easy to classify them as right-wing or left-wing... All attacks of this kind must be repelled in a consistent manner and with one will by the party as a whole."

The "Resolution of the Central Leadership on Some Issues of our Policy Concerning the Intellectuals" was also born in the spirit of the July decisions. This resolution placed relations between the party and the intellectuals on a basis of principle condemning the sectarian mistakes, lack of confidence in, and the persecution of some intellectuals: "When making a judgement of the intellectuals, the party and state organs must take into account, first of all, the work they have performed over the past 11 years as well as their present professional and political activities."

In his report Ernő Gerő asked the party membership to

regard the past as a closed chapter, and to support the resolution by opening a "clean sheet", a new chapter. Instead of analyzing past experiences, the membership was asked to look ahead. During the march of events, however, the real meaning of the "clean sheet" policy became clear. It represented a reconciliation with past mistakes and abandonment of sincere, thoroughgoing analysis of reality.

The cardinal importance of the July resolutions lay in the fact that by adopting them the party had regained the initiative. The Central Leadership had shown the way out of the grave situation, and although its work was not free from errors, it had created an opportunity for consolidation. The line adopted in July had the great merit of being a policy centred on the two-front struggle; it called upon the Communists to rally and join forces in the sense expressed in the title of the resolution: With Party Unity For Socialist Democracy. Addressing a mass rally in Salgótarján on August 12, János Kádár emphasized the same point: "Not personalities but ideas count... it is no longer in the interest of the party and people to continue or revive old debates over issues that have already been settled; unified action for the implementation of the party's policy is the order of the day."⁵²

The working masses responded favourably to the July resolutions. In August hundreds of thousands attended mass rallies to hear the policies discussed in different parts of Hungary. On August 12, 8,000 attended a rally in the city of Győr, 18,000 turned out to participate in another rally in Salgótarján and there were between 3,000 and 5,000 at eight others. On August 16 there was a massive turnout of 30,000 in Debrecen, 15,000 attended a rally in Diósgyőr; on August 26, 15,000 attended a rally in Nagykanizsa, 20,000 in Szeged and 17,000 in Kaposvár. For the first time in many months the audiences responded with enthusiasm as they listened to the party leaders.

The July resolutions took Imre Nagy by surprise. He practiced self-criticism again. Commissioned by the Central

⁵²*Szabad Nép*, August 13, 1956.

Leadership, comrades Sándor Nógrádi and Gyula Egri had a discussion with him on July 19, 1956. "He admitted that what had developed around him was completely incorrect and fraught with dangers. At first he protested that he had not consciously gathered people around himself. Later, however, he admitted that owing to bitterness and personal resentment he had not been selective about those he spoke to and of what he said to them. He also admitted that if this were to continue, the elements around him would increasingly take advantage of his attitude to attack the party.

"While stating that he would very much like to be readmitted to the party, he said he knew that this would be impossible so long as he did not dissociate himself from the elements who had used his name to launch an offensive on the party, did not repudiate 'erroneous views' he had represented earlier, and failed to practice sincere self-criticism for an unparty-like attitude.

"He pledged that a) he would change his attitude, and emphasize to all he spoke to his agreement with and support for the party line, b) he would end his relations with anti-party and unparty-like elements."⁵³ This is how a summary of the conversation quotes Imre Nagy's own words.

In fact Imre Nagy and his group withdrew for a couple of weeks to reassess the situation. However, Imre Nagy recovered fairly quickly and displayed an increasingly stubborn attitude. He demanded a complete apology and rehabilitation of his political line by the Central Leadership.

On August 14, 1956, on behalf of the Central Leadership comrades Gyula Egri and József Köböl had discussions with him with the aim of settling the problem of party membership. He refused to make any self-criticism, he was obdurate and arrogantly confident. Demanding that the issues on which he had been "charged as having a right-wing approach" be clarified; he added that he "did not want to grub about in old errors". It was his contention that he would

⁵³A *jobboldali nézetektől az osztályárulásig* (From Right-Wing Views to Class Betrayal) [Addition to the Theoretical and Practical Activities of Imre Nagy and His Group, 1947–1956] Manuscript, 1957.

"retire from political life as a non-party person" rather than make concessions. In any case he said "it was possible to arrange that he should be readmitted to the party without any need for debate over issues of principle because it was merely an organizational matter. Questions of principle could be clarified at a later date..." This was recorded in the report about the discussion.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, the leadership of the party was not consistent with regard to this problem either and this intermezzo was the overture to a new offensive against the party and the socialist order. The author's of the Imre Nagy biography express the position in their own way: "The third wave between July and October can be described with good reason as the prelude to the revolution."⁵⁵

4.5 The Eve of the Counter-Revolution

The offensive was renewed in the columns of the press. The keynote was sounded in an article by Géza Losonczy in *Művelt Nép* (Cultured People) on September 2. He asserted that complete revision of previous policy and punishment of those responsible were the preconditions for progress.

The launching of a new attack by the group led by Imre Nagy was made possible by the uncertainty and ambiguity in the Central Leadership where Rákosi's followers still held a majority. They continued to delay the total break with the errors of the past, displayed weakness and hesitation in implementing the new, and in some cases actively worked to obstruct implementation. A considerable section of the leadership, above all, Ernő Gerő was unable to break with old habits and style of work. Gerő totally lacked confidence and was afraid of the consequences of the new measures.

Ernő Gerő proved quite incapable of operating effec-

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵M. Molnár and L. Nagy: *Két világ közt. Nagy Imre útja* (Between Two Worlds. The Path of Imre Nagy). Imre Nagy Institute. Brussels 1959, p. 81 and p. 107.

tively as First Secretary. Hampered by fear of disclosure of old errors he was unable to commit himself to the wholehearted implementation of the July resolutions. The first successes following the July decisions brought his weaknesses into the open; he immediately overestimated the extent to which there had been an improvement of the situation. It is true that he himself told the Central Leadership in his closing speech at its July session that "exceptional activity is required on the part of our press, our Radio, the members of the Central Leadership, party committees and party branch organizations as well as the rank and file as a whole", but he was incapable of leading this activity.

The uncertainty of leadership was enhanced by the fact that in early September Ernő Gerő went on holiday to the Soviet Union and Comrade János Kádár was sent to attend the Seventh Congress of the Chinese Communist Party on September 7. Both returned to Hungary on 7 October.

The hesitations and impotence of the top leaders spread to the party activists. On September 10 the Central Leadership sent a letter to all party organizations and members. When the organizations discussed the letter at membership meetings, strong criticisms were voiced of the vacillations and procrastinations of some leading officials in "switching over from the old methods to those corresponding to the new line". Workshop membership meetings expressed the view that "since the July resolution, the solution to the problems has been going on too slowly".⁵⁶

Under these pressures the contradictions and inconsistencies in party policy were increasingly felt and exerted an intensive, unfortunate influence. The Hungarian Working People's Party had a membership of close to 900,000. A considerable proportion of the members were not Communists and did not have a firm ideological basis. Many of the party members were no more than sympathizers and easily influenced by various elements and shifting currents in the atmosphere. Members, coming in the main from the professional classes and office workers, often acted as vehicles

⁵⁶PI Archives. 276/9-264/1956.

through which petty bourgeois concepts, atmosphere and attitudes easily found their way into the ranks of the party. Earlier these elements had been fertile soil for the Rákosi type sectarian and dogmatic methods. Under the impact of the revisionist offensive, and the disclosure of errors they lost interest; many actually turned against the party's goals. Firm party leadership could have controlled the situation and given a healthy direction to events. There was no such leadership.

Vacillation spread to the ranks of the workers. Between 1949 and 1956 the number of industrial workers had risen from 387,096 to 729,000. This significant growth, however, necessarily went hand in hand with a dilution of the working class that created potential ground for vacillation and openings for revisionist undermining. About 50 per cent of those working in large factories in 1956 had not been workers before 1949, and had come into industry since that year. Meanwhile tens of thousands of the best workers had been appointed to responsible posts in industry, the economy, social organizations and public life. These trends affected the strength and influence of the solid workshop backbone of the working class. Of the more than 300,000 new workers 35 per cent came from agriculture, 25 per cent from those who formerly did not work in factories and 10 per cent from de-classed elements. Only 30 per cent came from a genuine working-class background. It was a period of great labour mobility. A 1955 survey estimated that only 27 per cent of the workers had been employed at the same place for more than 5 years. The mobility situation at Ganz Shipyards was typical: a workforce turnover of one third within a period of twelve months. All this hampered the emergence of the working-class attitudes of first-generation workers. The low level of class consciousness left an opening to hostile elements from the defeated exploiting classes (small entrepreneurs and kulaks, etc.) who had been obliged to take jobs in industry. They wore the workers' blue collar, but they sought to set the workers against their own class interests. From this springboard, the revisionist group, and the hostile forces lurking in its shadow, launched the "third wave" of their offensive.

The revisionists used the General Assembly of the Writers' Association on September 17 to prepare the overall offensive. Imre Nagy's supporters monopolized the platform, set the tone of the discussion and decisively influenced the decisions; in passionate, one-sided speeches they castigated the "slow tug-of-war" in the leadership, concentrated exclusively on adversity, and described the situation as one of deadlock in which no progress whatsoever was being made. Lack of progress was attributed to the "bureaucratic-sectarian-dogmatic resistance". There was, according to them, only one struggle to be waged against the danger of a "Stalinist and Rákosist restoration" and the hard-headed and "stubborn representatives of restoration" who wanted to bring back "Stalinist principles and methods" into public life. On the one hand, they condemned the slow pace adopted by the leadership and, on the other in connection with new measures they criticized haste.

They traced the root of all problems to the attitude of "certain influential people", in the party apparatus and state administration, which were established in the time of the cult of personality. This meant that a considerable part of the responsible leaders filling key posts had been appointed by an inadequate selection process. The key to the settlement of the problems is Imre Nagy. This was echoed and re-echoed by the whole "official" General Assembly.

The "national unity" of Hungarian writers was proclaimed as if it were a general demand: "...we Hungarian writers, joined in an offensive and defensive contract, pledge ourselves to tell the truth, irrespective of party attachment or philosophical conviction," was how the writer Gyula Háty, a member of the party, phrased this particular form of unity. "It is my conviction", he added, "that the real basis of this unity is that we are interdependent in our writers' struggle for truth."⁵⁷

The General Assembly had a significant impact on public opinion, because the writers' inflammatory speeches used

⁵⁷General Assembly of the Hungarian Writers. *Irodalmi Újság* (Literary Gazette), September 22, 1956.

concepts then enjoying immense popularity. They "swore" repeatedly in the name of the Twentieth Congress that they would struggle for "complete freedom", "serve progress and truth" and "be loyal to the people", and so on.

After the General Assembly, *Irodalmi Újság* (Literary Gazette), *Művelt Nép* (Cultured People), *Béke és Szabadság* (Peace and Freedom) and gradually *Nők Lapja* (Women's Magazine), *Szabad Ifjúság* (Free Youth) and all the provincial literary and party papers and magazines became virtually organs of the Imre Nagy group. The majority of journalists gradually became divorced from reality. In the initial stages they did not want to "lag behind" the new ideas and later they tended to consider the extent of their participation in criticizing the errors of yesterday as the measure of their talent.

A general campaign developed to isolate functionaries and to discredit the party leadership. To have the courage to agree with them on any point was to become the target of vituperative criticism. To disagree with this campaign in any way was likely to cause the accusation of being "Stalinist" and a stubborn advocate of restoration. To be so branded was to suffer ostracism. And this spiritual and ideological terror actually paved the way for the physical terror that would follow.

Writers toured the country to implement the Assembly resolution that "a writer or group of writers shall visit 10 to 15 major factories to explain the views of the General Assembly to the workers..." A string of meetings and debates followed. The ideological and spiritual preparation of the uprising was well under way.

In his study "Literary Gazette", Togliatti notes the coincidence of views, actions and timing. "Their agitation was immediately taken up by the Western radio stations to be transmitted hour after hour and day after day." Radio Free Europe was unstinting in its praise. A comment broadcast on September 9 declared: "The Writers' Association was courageous enough to choose the correct path in the face of opposition by the party leadership. It was evident from the very beginning that the writers were right as against the

party politicians." "It is no longer the wind but a veritable cyclone that blows away the withered leaves of the people's republic in Hungary," said Miklós Lázár in his commentary broadcast on September 30.

The external enemies of people's power in Hungary were of the opinion that the growing authority of Imre Nagy and his group must be used to effect a breakthrough. The strategists of Operation FOCUS calculated that if the Imre Nagy group succeeded in establishing a foothold on the ramparts of power, it would certainly manage to cut a gap through which the domestic enemy could penetrate. With this concept in mind, the Western propaganda organs encouraged Imre Nagy and those in his environment who exerted an influence on him to wage a consistent struggle.

On September 26, the Hungarian service of the BBC in London stated: "It is beyond doubt that the Hungarian people are giving a measure of advance confidence to Imre Nagy in the hope that he has learned the lessons of the failure of the half-solutions adopted in 1953 and 1954... Imre Nagy will lose all credibility if he accedes to the party's request and humbly confesses his sins." On October 15 the same radio station warned that "according to certain opinions in Budapest it would be incorrect for Imre Nagy to accept a minister's portfolio. It would be unwise because the present government is grappling with economic troubles and that would necessarily exert an adverse influence on the popularity of anyone who has anything to do with it". Although Imre Nagy did not base his policy upon Western propaganda, his activities and the position he had taken coincided with it and this, in turn, enhanced its influence.

In the first half of October the Western press and radio stations made every effort to prepare public opinion in the capitalist countries for the open attack they anticipated in Hungary. In the early days of October the French press commented: "The situation in Hungary gives rise to anxiety," "there is a breakaway trend, a 'desatellizing' process going on in Hungary at the moment." *The Observer* wrote that real events were taking place in Hungary. A *Daily Mail* comment that what was happening in Hungary... could well

be regarded as a turning point, was reported by the BBC on October 14.

Under the guidance of the Fraternal Association of Hungarian Fighters emigré celebrations and parades were held in the German Federal Republic, France and Austria. For example, in Austria there were military parades, rallies and fund-raising meetings in Mattsee on August 16, in Linz and Salzburg on August 26, in Graz on September 16 and in Vienna on October 6 and 7.

The attitude of the United States to these developments was determined at a secret meeting of the National Security Council at the end of June 1956, at which the new features of American policy toward the East were considered. Speaking to press correspondents on June 29, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles summarized the essence of the decisions taken at the meeting: 1. the Free World must be unified in exerting pressure to accelerate the final result which would mean the complete disintegration of international Communism and perhaps the end of the present system of the Soviet Union; 2. intensification of pressure especially on the satellite countries, which may lead to complete liberation.

In September 1956, "the South East European Commission" was set up in the House of Representatives. At its meeting of September 10 and 11 the Commission discussed the prospects of the "liberation" of Hungary and took decisions on the coordination of actions. The meeting was attended by the Reverend Béla Vargha, chairman of the Hungarian National Commission, ex-Premier Ferenc Nagy and representatives of the military emigrés' organizations operating in the Federal Republic of Germany. They included Colonel-General Emil Juszty, a high ranking military officer of the Horthy regime.

NATO's European member states were given a role in the implementation of Operation FOCUS. These states not only agreed with but also assisted in the implementation of the plans and military measures. They also approved of the role the emigré organizations were to play. After the Americans, reactionary circles in the Federal Republic of Germany

played the most important role in organizing the different "liberation" actions. They provided the assembly areas, the equipment and the location of conducting psychological warfare. Former experts of Hitler's Reich put their services and their hatred of socialism at the disposal of the Radio Free Europe Commission. The Gehlen intelligence organization carried on its activities in complete harmony with its American counterparts. It disposed of some 5,000 agents and its Hungarian department played an active role in the October events.

Radio Free Europe's principal line in the second phase of Operation FOCUS was virulently anti-Soviet. Whatever the subject of a programme might be, the final conclusion was invariably: "Hungary is not an independent country." If questions concerning agriculture were discussed, all problems and failures were the result of following the Soviet example. Sermons for the religious never failed to stress the atheism of the Soviet Union. The main obstacle to raising living standards was identified as "delivering to the Soviet Union every item of value from Hungary free of charge".

Every sort of lie was propagated about the Soviet Union. On March 5, for example, Radio Free Europe said: "At least 40 per cent of the coal produced in the Komló mines is taken out of the country at Záhony" (the border crossing point with the Soviet Union) and, for this reason, "Erzsébet hospital in the city of Győr will be left without heating in the coldest days of winter". They were not at all bothered by the fact that Hungary, poor in energy sources, had drawn deeply on Soviet aid to overcome fuel problems. The listener, without access to accurate information, was led to believe that uranium from the Hungarian deposits—mining had just started—was delivered to the Soviet Union at a ridiculously low price. To this blatant misinformation they added the claim, "all the problems of Hungary's economy could be solved from the sale of its uranium".

One of the main obstacles to counter-revolutionist plans was the presence of Soviet military units in Hungary. Consequently, the external media began to talk of the need to bring about a situation in which the Soviet Union would not

be able to offer assistance to the Hungarian socialist forces in the struggle against domestic reaction aided by imperialist organs. From October 1, withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Hungarian territory featured in top place of their list of demands. On October 3, 1956, Radio Free Europe reported: "Reports in the Austrian capital suggest that the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary and Romania can be reckoned with." The Hungarian service of the BBC went even further: "It is beyond doubt that the issue of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary has come very much into the picture. It is high time for the Russians to go home... But would that mean that afterwards Hungary would enjoy a larger measure of freedom and go her own way? That can only be the case if the whole Communist state machinery is dismantled simultaneously with the withdrawal of Soviet forces." On October 13 an elaborate programme was given: "Demand the withdrawal of the Soviet army, publication of Soviet-Hungarian agreements and accounts, democracy instead of democratism, independence instead of foreign patronage."

The influence of external pressure brought an intensification of hostile instigation, rumours spreading, whispering campaigns and the manufacturing of false news for propaganda purposes. Domestic hostile elements sent letters to the party organs. They were worded as though they represented the "voice of the masses" and threatened the functionaries. Of the letters sent to the party paper *Szabad Nép* (Free People) the one about the establishment and programme of an anti-people's democracy movement was quite noteworthy. Another letter reported that the "Independent Socialist Democratic Party" had been founded.⁵⁸ Opposition and hostile elements active among the students were quick to exploit the situation created by the decision to re-bury the victims of the show trials on October 6. The party had hoped that the sincere act of paying tribute to comrades executed after illegal trials for crimes of which they were

⁵⁸PI Archives. Register of the Letters to the Editor Column of *Szabad Nép*. Letters 1956/35, 787 and 46,013.

completely innocent, would help to lower political tension. These hopes were illusory. Instead the impact was as described by Togliatti "an improbable, weird, disturbing funeral parade".

Imre Nagy's followers correctly anticipated that the reburial ceremony would intensify the crisis of despair and shock. The groups active in the universities were only too eager to seize this opportunity to come into the open. Two committees secretly established in early 1956, the Operative Committee at the Budapest University of Economics and the Kolkhoz Society at the Budapest Faculty of Liberal Arts, planned and prepared a student demonstration to follow the reburial. Some 100 students marched from the cemetery to lay a wreath on the public memorial, marking the site of the execution of Hungary's first Prime Minister Lajos Batthyány in October 1849. Throughout the march they chanted the slogan: "Stop half-way and we vanish, Stalinism must perish!"

The party was caught unprepared. What was called "Rajk's funeral" was a profound shock for public opinion in all parts of Hungary. The Party Committee of Hajdú County wrote to the Political Committee to say that party functionaries and members had been surprised by the manner in which the "funeral of Comrade László Rajk and the other Comrades had been arranged. Party opinion had been ill-prepared for the event. The funeral addresses had caused a profound crisis of conscience among party functionaries and activists". The backbone of the party had been shaken.⁵⁹

The volume of opposition and overtly hostile agitation mounted after October 6. "Small Petőfi Clubs" were established in the provinces and they held "meetings of the intellectuals" around various converging subjects: an attack on the party leadership in Szolnok; "rehabilitation" of the class enemy in Hajdúböszörmény; denunciation of the co-

⁵⁹PI Archives. 276/9-284/1956. Letter by the Executive Committee of the Hajdú County Party Organization to the Political Committee. October 9, 1956.

operative farms and threats to their leaders in Kaposvár. At Budapest cadet schools agitation concentrated on the demand "the army must stand beside the people".

It is noteworthy that the nationalist and anti-Soviet slogans which came increasingly to the fore, were orchestrated from Radio Free Europe: "We are Hungarians whether we are inside or outside the party! The nation has recognized that it has to concentrate its spiritual forces on a single goal: achieving Hungary's independence. We will devote our strength, our future and lives, if need be, to the achievement of Hungarian independence." These are quotes from Radio Free Europe transmission on October 13.

It is interesting to note not only the similarity in the content of the "domestic" revisionist line and the agitation emanating from Radio Free Europe, but also the coincidence of dates. In *Művelt Nép* (Cultured People) on October 14 Sándor Fekete openly propounded Imre Nagy's third path version of "National Communism". He wrote "We want to go our own way. We are aware that we are a small nation, we need friends and allies, and we want to learn from everyone..." For "we want to go our own way" read—dissociation from Soviet experience. For "everyone" read—the West.

It was not accidental that the first openly voiced demand for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary was made at a meeting of intellectuals in Győr, attended and addressed by Gyula Háy, an authoritative representative of the Imre Nagy group. The demand formulated during the meeting at the local debating club on October 16 was: "The Soviet troops must leave our country!" It met with Háy's approval.

The leading organs of the party and state authorities failed to take effective action. Their uncertainty was evident in their decisions. The position taken by the party leadership on any important issue was invariably characterized by a defensive approach, a constant retreat. Economic problems stoked the atmosphere of dissatisfaction and exacerbated the general political situation. At the end of September it was announced that for the time being all long distance coach

services would be discontinued for reasons of fuel shortage, some 600 railway passenger services would be withdrawn for three weeks owing to the shortage of coal; one thousand motorized railway vehicles would be out of service, and there would be temporary reductions of fuel supplies for agricultural machine stations. Work was discontinued on a number of important construction projects. It was characteristic of the haphazard economic management activity that in a letter to the President of the National Planning Office on September 14, 1956, the President of the Statistical Office frankly admitted that owing to thousands of modifications even the Statistical Office no longer knew the valid version of the plan.

Under these serious conditions, only the Soviet Union offered a helping hand to Hungary. The Soviet Government announced the granting of a credit of 100 million roubles to the Hungarian national economy: 60 million in the form of raw materials, mainly fuels, and 40 million in foreign exchange repayable between 1960 and 1965 at an annual 2 per cent interest. The political leadership proved incapable of using even this assistance in order to expose the falsity of hostile propaganda.

The constant shifts in the positions taken by the party leadership engendered indignation among the workers. At first the leadership was convinced it would be damaging to the party to arrest Mihály Farkas, the former Defence Minister who had been deeply involved in illegal actions, yet two weeks later he was arrested. In a letter dated September 10, the Central Leadership informed the membership that it is possible for Imre Nagy to regain his party membership; a precondition, however, is that he must practice self-criticism, admit his errors, subordinate himself to the party resolutions and declare that he is ready to struggle for the implementation of the July 1956 resolutions. In spite of this, however, the Political Committee changed its stance, and readmitted Imre Nagy to the party on October 13 without his having made any self-criticism whatsoever. The only antecedent to readmission was a letter Imre Nagy sent to the Central Leadership, dated October 4 and carried in *Szabad*

Nép on October 14. In it Imre Nagy wrote: "I consider it absolutely essential that past charges levelled at me in connection with my political and ideological activity should be discussed in public before a leading party forum, and, should ideological clarification make such a step necessary, then I for one am ready to admit to errors shown to exist simultaneously with the correction of charges shown to be unfounded."

Mid-October saw a succession of students meetings and a host of public demands. On October 16, students of Szeged University established an organization independent of the party's youth organization. They sent delegates to other major institutions of higher education calling upon their students to join them. From October 20 to 23, meetings at several universities declared that they had joined or organized "circles" of their own. In Budapest, for example, law students established their own organization, the Hajnóczy Circle. Students of economics founded the Széchenyi Circle. Students of liberal arts formed the March 15 Circle, and a new formation called the Vasvári Circle appeared in the capital.

Witnessing the organizational activities of the opposition gathering strength day after day, the party membership expressed dissatisfaction and demanded that workers' power be defended. They expected the leadership to act. Instead, a large delegation headed by the party's First Secretary and the Prime Minister and whose members included János Kádár, Antal Apró and István Kovács went to Yugoslavia on October 14. At the meetings of the secretaries of the party committees and branch organizations there was criticism of "leaders who could take action but are travelling about all the time". The question was posed: "Who directs political affairs now, the writers or the Central Leadership?"

Demagogic and revisionist speeches were also delivered at the party meetings but most speakers were anxious about the defence of people's power. At these meetings the press came in for a great deal of criticism for the tone and character of many articles, which were felt to represent the free reign of "unbridled incitement against the system and anar-

chy". The press was seen as being no longer a weapon in the hands of the working class, and many speakers demanded the Political Committee should establish order in the media.⁶⁰

The most serious problem was the inability of the leading organs of the party to understand reality. Complete failure to recognize what was involved in the situation, helplessness, excessive self-confidence were the main characteristics of the leadership's position. Nevertheless, there were quite a few warning signals. The competent security organs reported the preparations being made by hostile elements on two occasions. In the second report it was also mentioned that the hostile action was expected to take place around October 22. However, this was described as "fantasy" by the First Secretary.

In the iron works of Csepel a session of party activists was held on October 22 in the afternoon. The speakers called attention to the possible danger of a counter-revolutionary uprising. Károly Kis, a member of the Political Committee and secretary of the Central Leadership declared the view reflecting official opinion: "Such an uprising would be suppressed within 30 minutes."⁶¹

Such an inappropriate evaluation of the situation led to the lifting of security measures taken on October 20. (These measures provided that liaison officers be sent to the divisions, that guards be strengthened, that the plan of alert of the armed forces be supervised and that the army should go on full alert.)

The uncertainty of the leadership was clearly recognized by the enemy and the opposition both believing that the favourable moment of taking action had arrived.

⁶⁰PI Archives. 276/9-288/1956. Records of the meetings of regional, county, district, town and factory party secretaries held on the basis of information given by the Central Leadership on October 18, 1956.

⁶¹Budapest Party Committee Archives. Csepel Iron and Steel Works. Documents Referring to the Counter-Revolution, p. 72.

Chapter 5

The Socialist Forces Against Counter-Revolutionary Revolt and Treachery (From October 23 to November 4, 1956)

5.1. The Preparation of the Demonstration

"It was characteristic of the Hungarian uprising that it was a spontaneous manifestation"—this widely held concept is quoted from an article by René Payot in the first issue of NATO's monthly magazine *Occident* on May 1, 1957 under the headline: "Heading for a New Budapest?" Almost all the authors of books and studies published in the West, however different their approaches to the problem, sought to justify the same concept.

In actual fact not only the uprising was in general preceded by extensive organizational activities, but the overture to the armed struggle, the student demonstration of October 23, was also consciously organized and directed. Naturally the overwhelming majority of the demonstrators did not know the organizers nor could they see the underlying driving forces. Everything took place in an atmosphere of "making history"; and blinded by nationalist feelings, the students participated in the mass rallies and in the subsequent demonstrations. For them everything appeared to flow "spontaneously", and they only needed to join the main stream.

Certain authors have made great efforts to prove that the goals and ideas of the revolt were defined by the different demands of the university students summarized in points which had been born in the "fiery atmosphere" of student rallies. There was nothing spontaneous about the points put forward by the students. They had all been formulated and published previously in articles by the group led by Imre Nagy and they did not deviate in any respect from what had

already been transmitted and demanded by Radio Free Europe in the "name of the Hungarian people". It is, therefore, not accidental that there were no basic differences of principle between the 16 points formulated by the students of architecture at the Budapest Polytechnical University, Imre Nagy's programme, and the 12 points of Operation FOCUS.

However, it was an effectively misleading difference that the demands were compiled in the course of the student meetings and the duplicated leaflets were distributed in the name of the student organizations. The students' actions were not inspired by ill-intentioned political calculation; there was no desire to dissemble or conceal their motivation. Romantic enthusiasm inspired their rallies, the formulation of their demands and all their actions. Nationalist views found a particularly favourable soil among students. That is why several of the points they formulated were concerned with respect for the nation's historical past and "national independence". Students were blinded by the belief that they were waging a struggle for the "purification of the ideas and for a better socialism". Although this did not apply to the ringleaders, it was common knowledge that the majority of university and college students were of working class or working peasant background. The demands therefore appeared to be presented by the "sons of the people" rather than the politicians of mixed fortunes and chequered careers, radio stations operating abroad and well-known reactionary emigrés. All this gave increased creditability to the "points" figuring on the list of demands, enhanced the impact of the actions and particularly confused the less well-informed.

Wide-ranging propaganda work had been carried on among university students by Imre Nagy's group and the Petőfi Club. "The Radical Group of the Budapest Working Youth Organization", founded secretly on October 6, embarked on systematic and organized dissemination of their views. The "proposals" of Radio Free Europe were spread by the groups of the youth movement led by priests and ex-monks.

The atmosphere of student rallies held prior to the demonstration on October 23 was one of extreme one-sidedness and dictatorial rejection of any sober thought or contrary proposal. In several places, organized groups were present to guide the atmosphere in a specific direction by interruptions, whistling, heckling and intimidation—as recalled by many participants. The students' parliament was in session at the Miskolc University of Technology for the Heavy Industry on October 23, 1956. During the meeting a student, Imre Dobi who had been elected chairman of the session resigned. He explained his reasons in the magazine *A Mi Egyetemünk* (Our University): "...the extreme violation of freedom of speech made it impossible for everyone to explain his position. Some participants whose conduct made me ashamed, a feeling shared by every cultured, thinking student and others, prevented the free expression of views by shouts, interruptions and whistling.

It was an excellent example of how to trample democracy underfoot. One moment, people demanded freedom of the press, next they discarded not only freedom of speech but also freedom of thought... some participants wanted our teachers and guests to voice views identical with their own but they did not ask them to voice these views, but wanted to force them to do so.

The manifestations I have described compelled me to offer my resignation as chairman of the meeting. I did not consider the course on which the assembly was proceeding to be compatible with my principles or the concept of democracy I had developed. The subsequent course of the meeting was not democratic either. The two who acted as co-chairmen imposed direct influence on the debate by their behaviour and views..."

In a final sentence Imre Dobi summarized the lesson to be drawn from the event. "This was dictatorship of elements taking advantage of the current mood among the masses to do great damage to the interests of youth."

That was the atmosphere created by the organized groups, while the others had been deprived of their clear vision by the enthusiasm common to young people, the desire

for "improving" socialism or the over-heated atmosphere generated by nationalist statements. That is why the address by the writer Sándor Bihari built upon nationalist demagoguery was received with general enthusiasm and tremendous applause in the Miskolc meeting. Bihari acclaimed "revolutionary" atmosphere and spoke in support of the demands submitted in the name of the fourth year engineering students: withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Hungary and Hungarian withdrawal from the Warsaw Treaty. In provocative terms he attacked the Soviet Union and the neighbouring countries. In Hungary "the whole people live in misery" because "the Soviet Union exploits us". His other reason for "the living standards being low" was that "we have been robbed of territories that always belonged to Hungary". He demanded that these territories "be reannexed". A tremendous wave of applause lasting for many minutes followed when he declaimed the infamous irredentist and territorial revisionist demand of the Horthy regime: "We want all our territories back!" Nationalist incitement of this kind rendered thousands of people blind and deaf, and prompted hundreds of young people to take up arms. In this way, the elements of nationalist, anti-Soviet "national unity" were forged.

The group led by Imre Nagy were well informed about the atmosphere of these student rallies and the direction in which they were moving. Indeed, they acted to help move them along that road. As László Molnár and László Nagy modestly explain in the book mentioned earlier, "Some members of the party opposition proposed as early as on Saturday, October 20 to their student friends that in the forthcoming days some delegations composed of intellectuals and young people should rally in front of the statue of General Bem..." On the selfsame day students of Budapest Polytechnical University decided that unless the government met their demands within two weeks, they would stage a demonstration to show their dissatisfaction.

Both Imre Nagy's group and the internal enemy, even if their goals were different, worked to have the demonstration take place at the earliest possible date rather than wait

for two weeks. They knew there must come a point beyond which they could no longer stoke up the atmosphere of tension. When that point was reached, a decline would be bound to set in. They also knew that the party and government leaders were due to return home from Yugoslavia on October 23 and that within a few days of their return the leadership would perhaps be capable of taking effective measures. They may also have been informed that action on the plan designed to prepare the People's Army to face a crisis was cancelled during the evening of October 21. Finally they calculated on exploiting the deep fraternal feelings of the Hungarian people and youth towards the Polish people in order to incite the students into staging a "solidarity demonstration".

The Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party held its 8th plenum from October 19 to 21, 1956. The main report was presented by Władisław Gomułka who had returned to political life after an interval of 7 years. The meeting elected him First Secretary of the Central Committee. The Central Committee called for the renewal of social and political life, the development of socialist democracy and decided to draw the masses of people into the management of the economy and the direction of state affairs to an increasing extent, to give workers a material interest in production, to take into account the specific conditions of Poland in the building of socialism, and so on. At mass rallies, Polish workers and students expressed their agreement with the resolutions adopted by the Central Committee meeting, and political activity was on the increase all over the country. In Hungary, the absence of official information about events in Poland facilitated the spread of rumours and concocted lies about sharp clashes, political struggles and student demonstrations. The circulation of these misleading reports created the basis for the call for a "solidarity demonstration".

A meeting of students at the University of Architecture and Transport, held in a highly provocative atmosphere on the evening of October 22, was attended by many persons who had no connection of any kind with this institution of

higher education. Among the speakers was József Szilágyi, Imre Nagy's lieutenant and right-hand man. He twice addressed the students. On the first occasion, he demanded that Imre Nagy be brought to power; when he rose to speak for the second time, he called for an immediate demonstration, and this brought agreement from the students straightaway. Student meetings at the Faculty of Liberal Arts and the Fine and Dramatic Arts took place in a similar atmosphere with identical calls for a demonstration.

In the late hours of the evening of October 23 the leadership of the Petöfi Club was also in session and "student delegations had arrived to attend the dramatic meeting", as Balázs Nagy, one of the leaders of the Club recalled. Following the meeting of the students of the Budapest Polytechnical University, the mobilization of the students of other universities and colleges began for a demonstration. The participants "decided to get in touch with Imre Nagy without delay and inform him about the idea of staging a demonstration and its objectives..."⁶² Imre Nagy himself returned from Badacsony to Budapest on the same day.

Throughout the morning of October 23 the leadership of the Petöfi Club proceeded with the organization of the demonstration. Its representatives and groups assigned to prepare the demonstration toured the universities and students' hostels to give instructions specifying the route of the march, formulating the slogans and planning how the demonstration would unfold. The "leading members" of the group around Nagy met in the home of Géza Losonczy to discuss a programme for a Government headed by Imre Nagy and those present followed the preparations for the demonstration with great attention.

Strangely enough the preparations were assisted by the attitude of the authorities. An editorial in *Szabad Nép* the party's central daily, approved the student actions. Headlined: "Új tavaszi seregszemle" (New Spring Review of Troops) it wrote, "Our party and its daily *Szabad*

⁶²*Az igazság a Nagy Imre-ügyben* (The Truth about the Case of Imre Nagy). Brussels 1959, p. 53.

Nép side with the youth, approve of their meetings and wish much success to the intelligent and creative discussions of young people... The overwhelming majority of university students attend these meetings as supporters of socialism..." On the eve of the counter-revolution the editorial also formulated the following "anti-Stalinist" statement: "Under existing conditions, every counter-revolutionary manifestation left unanswered, every bourgeois provocation plays into the hands of sectarianism." This revisionist "one-sided sensitivity" did not reckon seriously with the danger of an attempted bourgeois restoration. In practice it was one of the factors that paved the way for it. University students faithful to the cause of socialism, however, could deduce only one thing from the article. They were being told to work shoulder to shoulder with the others in every field. As a result almost all of the 15,000 university students in Budapest joined the demonstration.

The Minister of the Interior issued an order banning assemblies and demonstrations in the interest of public order. This was announced on Radio Budapest at 1 p. m.; then withdrawn at 2.30 p. m. and the demonstration was allowed to take place. The demonstration gave all sorts of organized and non-organized hostile elements an excellent opportunity to take to the streets. They were able to take over well-intentioned slogans under which the demonstration began, so that by the end of the march these had become anti-communist, anti-socialist and outright nationalistic. From behind the shield, provided by the misguided mass of demonstrators intoxicated by the emotional atmosphere of the march, armed counter-revolution emerged. Under cover of the evening that had fallen in the meantime, and at the opportune moment, the weapons intended to overthrow people's power were used to fire on the Radio building.

5.2. The First Phase of the Armed Revolt

It is a general opinion that the first phase of the counter-revolutionary revolt lasted until October 28 or 29. During that stage armed struggle was carried on with the object of

crushing the counter-revolutionary forces, but on the political front counter-revolution gained the upper hand and prevented victory by the forces loyal to socialism. As the first phase ended, Imre Nagy's group appeared to have assumed power, but the streets, the different committees and the municipal councils were already dominated by the armed gangs.

Armed revolt began, practically, simultaneously at several important locations and in each case adopted identical tactics. Unarmed demonstrators would show up in front of important public buildings, and as tension mounted the first shots would be fired at the defenders who would be under strict order not to return the fire. At the Hungarian Radio the first shots were fired after 8 p. m. and the organized siege began after 10 p. m. Not until midnight were the defenders given the order allowing them to return the fire. After 7 p. m. the rebels launched attacks on the truck and car pools, seized the vehicles and began transporting the "peaceful" demonstrators to the barracks, factories, arsenals and ammunition depots by car and coach. They occupied the arms factory, the international telephone exchange and later the headquarters of the party's paper *Szabad Nép*. The Artillery Officers' School was attacked by some 300 people around 7 p. m. Since the attackers were not given arms and the attitude of the servicemen there was a firm one, they withdrew. "At 8 p. m. they returned in motor vehicles and fired shots at the guards. Around 10 p. m. a similar attack was launched from the opposite side of the School. According to the report of the duty-guard, 70 to 80 per cent of the attackers captured were drunk."⁶³ The Óbuda Shipyards were attacked between 7 and 8 p. m. by three truckloads of people who attempted to persuade the workers to down tools and join them. Similar methods were adopted at arms factories, ammunition depots and later on at police stations and Budapest District Military Recruiting Centres.

It is indicative of the extent of advance planning and prep-

aration that the attackers invariably showed up at the most important points at the most expedient time. For example, it was clear that they would have been unable to deal with that thousands of workers at the Csepel Iron and Steel Works, and, with this in mind, they concentrated their first attack on its power plant. This is the life centre of the whole Works and if it is brought to a halt, operations become impossible in all the plants of this vast complex. The workers, however, held their own and defended the power plant successfully. The attack then moved on to the central garage. Armed youngsters joined the attack, and it was from them that the defenders who had been armed with iron bars acquired their first weapons. Shortly before midnight a concentrated raid was carried out on the Csepel District Military Recruiting Centre with the goal of eliminating a potential threat to the success of the attack on the Iron and Steel Works. The servicemen stationed in the Centre managed to defend the building till the morning and withdrew only after running out of ammunition.

Following their initial successes the counter-revolutionaries regrouped and built up the centres of the uprising during the first night. The armed forces of the counter-revolution were concentrated in the 8th and 9th districts in Pest and in the area of *Széna tér* in Buda. These concentrations are reflected in the figures for damage during the fighting. In the whole of Greater Budapest only 4.12 per cent of the houses were damaged during the fighting, but in the 8th district the corresponding figure was 18.27 per cent and in the 9th district 22.98 per cent. Of the victims of the fighting 22 per cent came from the 8th district, 14 per cent from 9th district and 13 per cent from the 7th district. They accounted for 49 per cent of the total casualties. The barracks named after György Kilián and located centrally in the 9th district emerged as one of the centres of the uprising. Some 1,500 servicemen, belonging to a supplementary military unit, were stationed in the barracks and arms were also kept inside the building. It was there that Colonel Pál Maléter who had been assigned to crush the counter-revolutionary centre went over to the side of the counter-revolutionaries two days later, on October 25.

⁶³Budapest Party Committee Archives. IIIrd District Guards Regiment No. 13, p. 2.

A considerable volume of literature on the counter-revolution has discussed at length the issue of the mass basis of the armed fighting. The report by the Committee of Five set up by the United Nations and a mass of western articles on the subject combined to assert that those involved with arms were mainly workers, young workers and university students. This assertion was offered as proof that what had taken in place in Hungary was not a counter-revolutionary uprising but a genuine revolution.

The leaders of the armed groups participating in the uprising were people with military training in street fighting. They selected the command posts with professional competence, built up bases that lent themselves to easy defence and were more than familiar with the different tactical aspects of fighting within the confines of a metropolitan city. They were recruited from army officers of the Horthy regime, gendarmes, ex-members of the Arrow Cross Party (the Hungarian nazi organization), hard core enemies of people's power and some officers of the People's Army who turned traitor. Many participated in illegal organizing activities, were in sympathy with the old regime or were blinded by their personal troubles or grievances.

Armed struggle waged by the organized enemy immediately won the support of the racketeer and criminal elements. It is common to each report on the unfolding events that criminals, people with criminal records played an important role in the armed gangs. Units of the Kiskunhalas Sharpshooters Regiment had an exchange of fire with counter-revolutionaries in the Jutai hills in the outskirts of Budapest on October 26. During the fighting they captured 23 persons including two women. The Regimental Command's report on the incident notes: "Many of the men captured had made their living from theft and vagrancy before October 23; 12 of the 21 men had had 8, 10 or as many as 15 workplaces in a matter of two years, 19 had 6, 7 or 10 addresses in one year and, according to their own testimony, two had been members of the Arrow Cross Party. One of the women had served a two-year prison sentence for prostitution. Six of the 23 had served prison terms from 6 months

to 4 years. Not one of those captured was found to have made his or her living from honest work." Another report says that when a 300 strong National Guard was to be organized from armed men in the Nineteenth District of Budapest, "the list of applicants was complete overnight with hooligans and criminals known to the police..."⁶⁴

Of the 89 defendants who were convicted between December 11, 1956 and January 7, 1957 for having committed counter-revolutionary actions, 42 per cent had criminal records. Clearly underworld gave full and determined support to the armed rebels. Very often they had no political motives. As a rule, elements of this kind have a genuine hatred of any order or authority that renders pillage impossible; they took up arms against law and order, harmony, peace and public security. They were natural allies of the conscious political counter-revolutionaries.

Ordinary people who had been misled also participated in and were killed in the fighting. What influenced them above everything else was the ideological preparation of the uprising. They went to battle for the so-called "National Communism". It was the propaganda and views of the revisionist "party opposition" that was primarily responsible for their choice of the wrong path and for their deaths. Young people in large numbers participated in the armed counter-revolution although they were actually not counter-revolutionaries. With murderous cynicism the directors of the uprising, the agitators of Radio Free Europe took advantage of the political inexperience of young people and children, their patriotic enthusiasm and heroic dreams. However, there are also data in this respect that are noteworthy.

During the armed actions some 3,000 deaths were registered. Of the dead some 20 per cent were under 20 years of age, and 28 per cent were aged 20-29. Almost 25 per cent of the wounded were under the age of 18; almost 50 per cent came from the 19 to 30 age group.⁶⁵ It is instructive to com-

⁶⁴Budapest Party Committee Archives. XIXth District Guards Regiment No. 6.

⁶⁵*Fontosabb adatok az 1956 október-decemberi időszakról* (Some Important Data about the Period between October and December, 1956). Central Statistical Office, Budapest 1957, p. 46.

pare these figures with the age distribution in 1955 of the membership of *Regnum Marianum* (some 1,500 to 2,000 persons), the organization led by priests and ex-monks: 6–14 years: 15 per cent; 15–19 years: 38 per cent; and 20–26 years: 37 per cent. It would be inappropriate to draw far-reaching conclusions from these two groups of data, yet, the parallels are obvious: a number of young people took up arms under the influence of hostile education going on for several years.

The composition of the rebels also underwent gradual change. After the first days of fighting a considerable proportion of misled young people realized the true character of the people and aims around them and threw away their weapons. This was particularly true of university students. Among them the phrase "This is not what we wanted!" spread rapidly. By October 26 to 27 almost two-thirds of the college and university students had left the places where their educational institutions were located. In other words, they had withdrawn from participation in the events, a fact that is borne out by the figures on those killed during the armed conflict; the total number of student victims was 20. In the meantime the ranks of the political enemies of the social order were being filled up by those opposed to law and order. The gates of prisons were flung wide open to release the inmates: the fascists, reactionary conspirators, robbers and murderers. From October 25 to the end of the month a total of 9,962 people convicted of crimes and 3,324 political prisoners (including spies and armed conspirators) were set free. Many took up arm following their release; others were active in the political organizations of the counter-revolution.

Addressing the representatives of the armed groups at their November 2 meeting, the leader of the centre at *Baross tér* boasted that "all the political prisoners who have been released are participating in the fighting".⁶⁶

It must be borne in mind that the counter-revolution

⁶⁶PI Archives. E. Gy. C/II/5. Minutes of the meeting held at the Budapest Division of the Ministry of the Interior on November 2, 1956.

described all the released prisoners as "political" in an effort to make them more "acceptable" to public opinion.

The initial successes of the counter-revolutionary armed uprising owed much to the frenzied political atmosphere particularly in the early stages. There had been months of fermentation in public opinion, especially in Budapest. Successive debates and the press had aroused public interest and the failure to act created growing dissatisfaction even among those most distant from political affairs. Slogans camouflaged the armed uprising. The constant display of Hungary's national banner, and the frequent rendering of the National Anthem made it difficult to grasp the underlying essence of events. Some 10 to 15 per cent of the workers in the factories had come from declassed elements. Now, they too, wore the blue collar of the worker and spoke of struggling for "better socialism", the "purification of socialism", democracy and "true" socialism. The uncertainty which irradiated from above, defeatism and self-contradictory attitudes contributed to their success. Increasingly aggressive and vocal these elements emerged from October 26 at the head of "revolutionary" and "national" councils and committees. At that time, they not only tolerated but actively included the representatives of the working people into the different counter-revolutionary organizations. In the beginning "defence of the national interest" and "adjustment" of socialism to the conditions prevailing in Hungary figured high on their declared agenda. In the initial stages they did not come out against socialism. Their initial demands were limited to advocating "adjustment", but as the events unfolded, they gradually introduced openly anti-socialist slogans, always timed to carry the tide of emotion a stage forward. The "revolutionary" committees supplied the mass basis for counter-revolution and prepared public opinion to react favourably to each new step. While the slogans were misleading the masses, the work of establishing the power organs of the counter-revolution went ahead.

As from October 25, organizers arriving from Budapest attempted, in concert with their local allies, to launch armed struggle in almost all the major provincial towns. However,

since they were not strong enough to achieve this objective, they resorted to the method of pogroms and started a campaign of incitement against the state security units and the organs of state loyal to workers' power.

Many people were unable to recognize the organized nature of the events, because they could see no evidence of a central command to which the armed counter-revolutionary gangs were subordinated. The truth is that there were several command centres. The group led by Imre Nagy was one directing force that exerted considerable influence on the course of events. Armed gangs were attached to several commands, but they all acted basically along uniform political and military lines. The groups engaged in illegal organizing activities had long worked essentially in an identical manner and for the same goals, and from the first moment Radio Free Europe had emerged as the general staff of the armed uprising, the "popular resistance centre in the Free World".

However, Radio Free Europe was no more than an executive organ even at that time. As Robert T. Holt wrote, "...every day Munich receives daily tactical guidance from New York by teletype..." and "...in the middle of 1956, policy guidances, particularly at every crucial moment began to become more authoritative".⁶⁷ The Radio Free Europe Centre made every effort to carry out the instructions and to guide and exert an influence on the armed struggle. Béla Horváth and Imre Vámos, who worked earlier for Radio Free Europe, wrote in the February 1962 issue of *Látóhatár* (Horizon): "The large building complex of Radio Free Europe in Munich was filled in those days with couriers arriving from the four corners of the world, delegates of parties and interest groups, special Cold War correspondents and those pseudo-scholars, the Kremlinologists. Cables and instructions came pouring in from America. There were non-stop meetings and all the fun of the fair!"

"The popular resistance centre in the Free World" went to work from the first day: Radio Free Europe supplied the

⁶⁷R. T. Holt: *op. cit.*, p. 39.

counter-revolutionaries with tactical instructions in respect of both the political struggle and the armed fighting. It formulated the political demands, suggested the persons to be included or omitted from the "national unity government", and advised the rebels which government posts they should try to occupy. To achieve victory through armed struggle or at least to secure considerable gains—these were the main objectives of the first few days.

The leaders of Radio Free Europe did everything they could to encourage their supporters in Hungary to prolong the fighting for as long as possible, to increase confusion so that the chaotic state of affairs would allow reactionary forces to return to Hungary from the West in growing numbers and join in the armed struggle for the victory of the counter-revolution. In connection with this, Horváth and Vámos commented in the above-quoted issue of *Látóhatár*: "Their [the leaders of Radio Free Europe] principal concern was to prevent the restoration of law and order to maintain a state of maximum confusion. They put out the story that the Western world was on the move. To maintain the dynamism of the uprising, new demands were voiced every hour. The guiding slogan was: Make the revolution a continuous one! The situation in Hungary must not be allowed to return to normal and become stabilized." Messages of encouragement served the same purpose. "The appreciation and admiration of the Free World" was one message transmitted almost continuously as was President Eisenhower's declaring that the heart of America throbs with the people of Hungary. In this way, people were persuaded that they could count upon assistance from the "Free World" under the auspices of the United Nations, if only they held out in the armed struggle for a while. Even the report of the infamous Five Member Committee on Hungary set up by the United Nations admitted that some of Radio Free Europe's transmissions had appeared to give the impression that assistance would be forthcoming for the Hungarians.

One Radio Free Europe analyst argued in his commentary—Code No. C-524—on international affairs that the United Nations had a right and a duty to intervene in Hun-

gary. Western journalists and other persons who had arrived in Hungary "incidentally" were unanimous in reporting that those in arms anticipated assistance and were convinced that it would come. Two Austrian newsmen, Fritz Molden and Eugen Géza Pogány reported: "Gestalten, mit Maschinengewehren und Karabinern bewaffnet, hielten uns auf... Ihr seid doch Amerikaner, ihr habt uns doch Munitionsnachschub gebracht... Der gute Mann konnte und wollte nicht verstehen, daß wir nur friedliche Journalisten waren. Dieser Vorfall wiederholte sich immer wieder."⁶⁸

Three Austrian and German trade union officials who arrived in Budapest on October 31 reported similar experiences in "Four Days of Freedom".

Several journalists and eye witnesses mention that the armed counter-revolutionary groups turned directly to Western diplomats for assistance. "One group sent a letter to a Western delegation with the following request: we only possess light arms and it is a vital question for us to acquire anti-tank cannons, flame-throwers and tank destroyers. Others appealed to the United States to drop arms, ammunition and food by parachute..." Many people from armed groups rang up the Budapest legations of Western countries, claiming they were fighting "The first battle of the Third World War in defence of Western values, and in common interests"—as *The New York Herald Tribune* wrote in its November 17, 1956 issue. The confidence and hopes of the counter-revolutionaries were strengthened by the fact that the first group of trained military organizers and experts recruited from Hungarian emigrés had already arrived in Hungary and, disguised as sanitary packages, the first consignments of ammunition from the West had also arrived.

Financed by the Radio Free Europe Commission, the

⁶⁸F. Molden and E. Pogány: *Ungarns Freiheitskampf*. Neue Wiener Presse, Vienna 1956, p. 31. "We were stopped by persons armed with rifles and submachine guns. They said 'You are Americans, you have obviously brought ammunition for us... The poor man could not and would not want to understand that we were peaceful journalists. This incident was repeated many times.'"

Fraternal Association of Hungarian Fighters set up a special operation centre to handle military aid from abroad. The magazine of the organization *Hadak Útján* (On Armies' Path) reported in its special edition of November 1956 that "the staff of the Community has established a special leading organ under the command of General András Zákó". The operations centre was in Vienna and one of its subcommittees was sent to the Austro-Hungarian border. The staff, "like every Hungarian in the world is filled with one sacred desire: to assist the heroes of Hungarian freedom with arms if possible".

Radio Free Europe encouraged people to struggle with hysterical enthusiasm. It not only kept alive the belief in assistance but gave actual military advice as to how to choose the type of tactics to be adopted and the forms of warfare. The military adviser of Radio Free Europe, Julián Borsányi, a lieutenant-colonel of the army of the Horthy regime, gave military instructions under the pseudonym "Colonel Bell". His programmes beamed by Radio Free Europe discussed the ways and means of armed struggle to be waged in cities, of destroying tanks, of defending the bases of the uprising, and so on. He used all his powers of persuasion to make people believe that the rebels would be able to defeat the Soviet army.

Radio Free Europe maintained direct contact with some of the more important armed gangs. The terrorists in *Corvin köz*, for example, had a radio link with Munich. Radio Free Europe came on the air at 11 p. m. every day and the counter-revolutionaries replied to the transmission at 1 a. m.

It was the major goal of the imperialists to stir up nationalism and to intensify anti-Soviet hysteria with all the means at their disposal. They also wanted to achieve the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from the struggle as a first step and then their withdrawal from Hungarian territory altogether. That was thought to be the necessary precondition for the restoration of capitalism in Hungary. Radio Free Europe's daily instruction from New York, for example, specified on October 25 with special emphasis that Radio Free Europe

Munich should repeat as often as possible that "the Kremlin as well as Hungarian and other satellite leaders must bear responsibility for the bloodshed in Hungary". The underlying intention was obvious: to shift responsibility for the bloodshed on the Soviet Union in the eyes of the masses and to turn Hungarian public opinion as a whole against the Soviet troops. On October 25 Radio Free Europe transmitted: "Martial law must be lifted, and the Soviet troops must be ordered back to their barracks. There can only be an end to bloodshed if the decree announcing martial law is withdrawn immediately..." The counter-revolutionary gangs and agitators re-echoed these demands straightaway.

The Radio Free Europe Commission evaluated Imre Nagy and the group around him according to whether or not they would be capable of achieving the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

5.3. The Struggle Waged by the Forces Loyal to Socialism

The armed counter-revolutionary uprising took Hungary's socialist forces by surprise. As a result, no preventive measures were taken. In Budapest, for example, there were practically no combat-ready garrison troops, nor was there any defence plan for the special armed forces to counter an armed attack launched by the domestic enemy. The situation was aggravated by the treason of some police and army officers already in the first hours. An uncertain or procrastinating approach by the officers in the general staff, by the commanders of the armed services, by the officers of the military academies as well as conscious sabotage or open treason on the part of certain officers caused serious damage especially in Budapest. The top party and state leadership was also unstable in its appreciation of the situation. A broadcast address by Ernő Gerő, the First Secretary of the party, on the Radio at 8 p. m. exposed the counter-revolutionary character of the armed struggle, but made the mis-

take of lumping together as one the enemy and the opposition, those tending to disagree, the dissatisfied and the impatient. At the same time, Gerő had nothing to say about the way out of the crisis. He failed to call upon the workers and Communists to fight. In spite of this, however, and under extremely difficult conditions the Communists were ready to fight the counter-revolution whenever they had the slightest opportunity to do so. The assertion by bourgeois writers and journalists that the party disintegrated in the first moment, and that only Soviet troops were fighting the "insurgent Hungarians" was patently untrue.

In a night session of October 23 to 24, the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party took essentially correct decisions against the counter-revolution. The party had a combat programme for arming the workers, to suppress the armed attackers and to satisfy the fundamental demands. In view of the organized and extremely heavy attack as well as the treason committed by some high-ranking army and police officers in key posts, the Central Leadership decided to appeal to the Soviet troops for assistance. A Military Committee was elected with the task of setting army units in motion as state security forces in order to restore law and order. The arming of Communists and workers as well as ensuring cooperation between the Hungarian and Soviet troops were also among the Military Committee's tasks.

Imre Nagy took part in the session of the Central Leadership. He was present when the issue of asking the Soviet troops for support was discussed and later when the motion was adopted. He was also present when other decisions were reached and agreed with them. Therefore, the Central Leadership, setting out from the idea of establishing the broadest possible unity within the party for the struggle against the class enemy admitted Imre Nagy and his associates into its ranks; it elected a new Political Committee and proposed that Imre Nagy be appointed Prime Minister. At the same time, Ernő Gerő was confirmed in his post as First Secretary, but on October 25 he was relieved of office and János Kádár was elected to be First Secretary.

On October 24 Prime Minister Imre Nagy declared martial law and a curfew. In a speech on October 25 he admitted: "A small number of counter-revolutionaries and provocateurs has launched an armed attack against the order of our people's republic..." The party pledged ruthless struggle against the counter-revolution and promised that those who had been misled would not be punished if they stopped fighting.

Although they often learned of events through the Radio, the forces loyal to socialism resisted the attacks of the counter-revolution. In the factories the Communists organized workers' guards and, in the first stage, they were in control of the situation in the overwhelming majority of the factories and defended them successfully against attack. They carried on a heroic struggle against the armed counter-revolutionaries in the first days, although all too often their only weapons were their tools, iron bars and the like. There were innumerable examples of this kind of resistance. In the Danube Shoe Factory, for example, some 40 guards defended the workshop with iron bars and 5 sporting guns. In the early days the workers of the Gheorghiu Dej Shipyards were armed with iron bars and rocks. They used them successfully to acquire weapons from the attackers they had driven off. The workers of the Csepel Iron and Steel Works acquired their weapons when armed with iron bars they defended the garage against attackers. The guards of the Budapest Radio Engineering Factory were organized in the early hours of October 24 and their arsenal consisted of only one captured sub-machine gun. The factory guards defended the Óbuda Shipyards which suffered the first attack on October 23 between 7 and 8 p. m., with tools and a couple of rifles. The Budapest Hosiery Factory was attacked at 11 p. m. by an armed gang whose members demanded that the workers hand down their tools immediately. Instead of yielding to this demand the workers drove off the attackers with the tools close at hand. The Újlak Brick Factory was defended successfully by some 30 factory guards. In the Chinoin Pharmaceutical Works the general manager and the party committee assisted in organizing the defence. The Budapest Ce-

ment Company was guarded by workers throughout all the events.

In the districts of Budapest the party committees endeavoured to organize defensive struggle although they had not received instructions to this effect from above. Those who recognized the dangers in the situation fought instead of carrying on agitation. In the Third District of Budapest the Communists armed themselves with weapons and hand grenades obtained from the Damjanich Barracks and managed to maintain law and order in the district until October 30. In the Tenth District 110 people, mobilized during the late hours of October 23, defended the district party headquarters till October 30 when they retreated to the territory of the Kőbánya Breweries. In the early days some 600 people maintained law and order in the district; 380 of them were factory guards in 400 factories. Their weapons which included 120 sub-machine guns, 4 light machine guns, 600 rifles and 360 pistols were made available by the School for Training Customs Officers. At Csepel some 250 Communists defended the Csepel Iron and Steel Works. In the evening of October 26 they were reinforced by four tanks and fifteen anti-fascists who had fought as partisans in World War II. They brought two truck loads of weapons and ammunition. One of the ex-partisans was killed while defending the Works. On October 27 new army units arrived at Csepel and restored law and order. The servicemen were withdrawn on October 29 by an order issued personally by Colonel Pál Maléter. The Works were occupied by the counter-revolutionaries the next day. In a few days they caused damage amounting to 3.7 million Forints and, among other things, the "honest revolutionaries" stole 380 motor bicycles.

When the Communists were unable to hold the Csepel party headquarters any longer, they retired to a major industrial plant which the workers had transformed into a centre of battle. The Communists of *Angyalföld*, the Thirteenth District of Budapest, directed the struggle waged by 350 armed workers and 380 servicemen from the Láng Factory. They gave arms to the workers of the neighbouring

Fourth District, Újpest, who were attempting to recapture the district party headquarters, municipal building and police station from the counter-revolutionaries. The workers' centre was in the Újpest Mining Machinery Factory. Some 160 workers were armed with the weapons obtained from the Láng Machine Factory.

The anti-fascist fighters of World War II were among the first to take up arms. Some 300 of them reported immediately and participated in action, in the defence of important public buildings. They took part in the offensive by which the headquarters of *Szabad Nép*, the party's daily paper, was recaptured.

Substantial forces were also mobilized in the provinces to defend people's power. Factory guards were organized everywhere and party headquarters defended. Experienced Communists and older workers who had participated in the class struggle before 1945 and recognized the counter-revolutionary nature of the events took the lead. In Nógrád County, hundreds demanded weapons from the authorities, but impotent leadership and defeatism prevented the recruiting of a regiment from among miners. Meanwhile, the counter-revolutionaries were moving about fully armed; the miners struggling to defend socialism had to take weapons from them.

The people of Nógrád County got in touch with their comrades in Czechoslovakia who gave them assistance in the form of arms, ammunition, food and propaganda materials. The Nógrád Communists will always remember that, at the time of the coordinated attack launched by the class enemy, the Communist leaders of the neighbouring districts in Czechoslovakia were prepared as internationalists to give every assistance. Guided by their Communist convictions they put aside all moralizing about the legality of giving aid, and abjured lengthy considerations of whether help would represent "interference" with Hungarian domestic affairs. The help they gave made possible the establishing of armed units at Salgó, Baglyasalja, Karancslapujtő and other

places, which then maintained socialist law and order and people's power.⁶⁹

In Békés County, in and around the city of Szarvas, the former agricultural proletarians recognized fairly early the danger of being turned into serfs again. Counter-revolution failed to gain the upper hand there even for the shortest period; the armed guards of the party and Communists were in control throughout.⁷⁰

The most conscious members of the farmers' cooperatives armed themselves with axes, spades and scythes to defend common property against reactionary forces, the former landowners and the rich peasants (*kulaks*) who were quick to re-emerge seeking to restore the past.

The Committee of Five established by the United Nations stated in its report on the "Hungarian Question" that certain units of the Hungarian army fought on the side of the insurgents but that the armed forces as a whole had disintegrated right at the beginning of the uprising. The report elaborated this lie later by saying that it was a noteworthy fact that no Hungarian military units had fought alongside the Soviet troops. Unfortunately, little has been done to make the truth public which flatly contradicts this statement.

No unit of the armed forces of the People's Republic of Hungary went over completely to the side of the counter-revolutionaries. There were, however, quite a few cases of treason and desertion, there was also a large measure of irresolution, but the overwhelming majority of the units of the armed forces were combat ready and carried out the orders (if any orders were given) until October 28 or 29. However, in the early days the guiding activities of the Ministry of Defence were almost completely paralyzed owing to the treason of some officials and the irresolution of others. It was characteristic of the chaotic state of affairs that on Oc-

⁶⁹V. Bozsik: *A nógrádi kommunisták harca az ellenforradalom ellen* (Struggle Waged by the Communists of Nógrád County against the Counter-Revolution). Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1957, p. 142.

⁷⁰D. Varga: *A Viharsarok visszáit* (The Stormy Corner Fights Back). The Publishing Company of Békés County 1959, p. 96.

tober 24 the 6,700 servicemen and 50 tanks stationed in Budapest were scattered at 30 places and therefore incapable of delivering a concentrated heavy blow. Hardly any information or orders were given by the Ministry of Defence to the military units; consequently, they had to rely on the Hungarian Radio. It was as late as October 26 when units stationed in the provinces were given orders by the Ministry of Defence to defend public buildings. In the absence of orders, army units often acted on their own and fought the armed counter-revolutionaries. In the early days they concentrated their efforts on defending their own establishments, and as from October 26, they proceeded to suppress the counter-revolutionary forces. There are many examples for their success.

On October 26, army units arriving from Nagyatád restored law and order in the city of Pécs. At Kalocsa, the prison building was defended and the attackers scattered. In the town of Cegléd military police were established to maintain law and order. In Esztergom the municipal building was recaptured from the counter-revolutionaries. In Kecskemét, the criminals released from prison, together with others, launched an armed attack but this counter-revolutionary group was dispersed by air force and infantry units. In Nyíregyháza, a Military Defence Council was set up and a joint plan for defence of the town elaborated with locally stationed Soviet troops. In Hatvan, Hungarian and Soviet troops agreed on a joint defensive plan.

On October 27, units of the Hungarian army began a large-scale action designed to ensure the restoration and the maintenance of law and order. The most important cities were closed to traffic from Budapest to prevent the counter-revolutionary organizers from reaching them from the capital. In towns threatened by released prisoners the working population enjoyed the protection of the armed forces. In the town of Kiskunhalas a council of workers, peasants and soldiers was established by representatives of the party and the military command to defend the people's democratic power. Military control was declared in the towns of Keszthely and

Nagykanizsa. In Zalaegerszeg, the members of the "revolutionary council" were arrested.

On October 26 and 27 the troops used their weapons while carrying out orders in several cities (Szeged, Miskolc, Dunaújváros, Debrecen, Székesfehérvár, Kecskemét, and so on). In many places they successfully defended the party committee headquarters and municipal buildings against armed attack. All orders to use their weapons were carried out and the determination to fight the counter-revolutionary bandits was made more resolute as the men saw comrades fall in action.

In the defence of workers' power, an outstanding role was played by units composed of new recruits transferred to the State Security Authority, some units of the police, the outposts of the border guards and other various military units. In general the 3rd Army Corps held its own and some units put up an exemplary struggle. They had to ensure the security of the routes of the Soviet units moving to Budapest. By October 28, they had crushed the counter-revolutionary move in Kecskemét. By the same day units of the 5th Motorized Division had restored order in the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers. The 27th Infantry Division carried on the fight against the counter-revolutionaries in Budapest for several days and its commanders repeatedly requested orders to recapture the Kilián Barracks. However, the orders never reached them; either because of the irresolution at the Ministry of Defence or the subversive obstruction by the traitors under Pál Maléter. Units of the motorized regiment of Eger defended the Ministry of Defence and destroyed the armed counter-revolutionary gangs operating in its vicinity in actions carried out jointly with Soviet military units. The headquarters of the Central Leadership were defended jointly by 101 sailors of the Danube flotilla and a unit of the border guards coming from the provinces. They also cooperated with Soviet troops. The Budapest barracks named after the poet Sándor Petőfi also carried on a successful struggle. The defenders held 680 counter-revolutionaries and 150 released prisoners under arrest. But there were also victims of the fighting.

Responding to a request for assistance, the Soviet troops went into action in defence of people's power in Hungary early in the morning on October 24. The Soviet command designed to act as liaison with the Hungarian forces arrived at the Ministry of Defence at 3.30 a. m. under the protective shield of a reconnaissance panzer battalion. In cooperation with the Hungarian command, the Soviet officers got down to work straightaway on locating the armed counter-revolutionary groups in Budapest. As a result of their joint work they had drawn up a map containing all the major armed counter-revolutionary centres in the Hungarian capital by morning. The first Soviet combat troops arrived in Budapest around 4.30 a. m. and went into action against the counter-revolutionaries straightaway.

The tactics of the Soviet troops was determined by political rather than military considerations in the early days. As a rule, the Soviet units were engaged in defensive activities and did no more than return fire when fired upon. In this initial stage the idea was a demonstration of strength that, it was hoped, would make an impact on the misled armed people, non-counter-revolutionary young persons who had been blinded and exploited by the reactionary forces. This Soviet action assisted the Hungarian socialist forces both morally and politically so that they could carry out their combat programme in the struggle against the counter-revolutionaries under more favourable conditions.

Adopting this type of stratagem was largely attributable to the fact that in the early days neither the Hungarian leaders nor the Soviet military commanders had available a clear assessment of the actual military strength of the counter-revolutionary gangs nor did they have a clear view of their carefully planned sniping tactics. They did not reckon with the fact that 12 years after the liberation of Hungary from fascist rule reaction still had considerable strength. During their demonstrations of strength the Soviet forces were frequently subjected to expertly directed surprise volleys which claimed several lives. A surprise attack in the vicinity of the Kilián barracks saw quite a few young Soviet soldiers give their lives in defence of socialist Hungary.

In accordance with their deterrent stratagem some of the Soviet troops participated in the defence of important public buildings and bases while others performed rapid manoeuvres in the streets of Budapest. The position of the Soviet command at that time was that the Hungarian military units were capable of crushing the armed gangs, and that the role of the Soviet troops was that of assistance. The decisive blow was to be delivered by the Hungarian soldiers. To this end Major General Tihonov proposed on October 25 that under the guidance of a Hungarian commander two divisions of the 3rd Army Corps should crush the counter-revolutionary uprising. The Soviet units were to give assistance in the form of covering fire. This plan, based on the determination to fight shown up to that time by the Army Corps, was quite a realistic one. However, there was confusion in the political leadership and the supporters of Imre Nagy prevented implementation of the plan.

The commanders of the Soviet troops endeavoured to cooperate with the Hungarian units everywhere. The effort was successful mainly in the provincial towns and in the defence of important bases in Budapest. But in some parts of the Hungarian capital inadequate coordination or the treachery of some Hungarian officers resulted in heavy losses of life.

The counter-revolutionaries and their allies mounted a campaign of hysterical incitement against the Soviet troops. The revisionists joined this anti-Soviet chorus. In spite of this, however, the attitude displayed by the Soviet soldiers towards the peaceful population was one of friendship. They had confidence in the Hungarian workers and gave the workers of several factories weapons for their defence. The Hungarian working people also gave ample evidence to the effect that they expected the Soviet soldiers to come to their aid as comrades. The factory guards offered assistance to the actions carried on by the Soviet troops on several occasions or went to the aid of smaller Soviet army units which had run into difficulties. Despite the mortal threats of armed gangs, workers, doctors and health service workers did not hesitate to give food to the Soviet soldiers and save the wounded even at great personal risk. Doctors ran the risk

of losing their lives when defending and treating wounded Soviet personnel. In some places they even hid the weapons and concealed them until the wounded had recovered. These were excellent examples of Soviet-Hungarian friendship.

After a few days the brutal actions and sniping tactics adopted by armed counter-revolutionaries exposed the barbarity of their attitude. On October 26 and 27, as cooperation between the Hungarian forces and Soviet troops increased, it became possible to switch from a strategy of deterrence to the task of crushing the centres of armed counter-revolution.

In the night of October 27 to 28, the armed forces of the people's power delivered decisive blows to the counter-revolutionary rebels. In the provinces organized armed revolt was practically crushed. In several parts of Budapest the armed gangs suffered serious defeats. Soviet and Hungarian troops joined forces in destroying the counter-revolutionary centre at *Széna tér*. The same night saw the crushing of the counter-revolutionaries at Újpest and the recapturing of public buildings in the same district with massive assistance given by the Communists of the Fourth and Thirteenth Districts of Budapest as well as by servicemen and tanks. Soviet tanks carried weapons to the Láng Machine Factory and officers from Hungarian armoured units trained the workers in their use. The officers loyal to socialism of the Zrínyi Military Academy defended the party headquarters in the Eighth District successfully. The 1st Battalion from Lenti and ten tanks belonging to units of the Tapolca Mechanized Armoured Regiment crushed a series of counter-revolutionary centres in the area of Várpalota. By the evening of October 27 the 2nd Battalion of the 37th Infantry Regiment had crushed all pockets of resistance in the Csepel district with the assistance of Hungarian and Soviet tanks. The Communists of the Csepel Iron and Steel Works wrote the following: "They recaptured the police headquarters and annihilated several armed centres. The overwhelming majority of the soldiers were fine, conscientious young men of peasant background who carried out the orders, in their view, without hesitation. Most of the offi-

cers tended to waver; only the senior officers were firm in their approach. The biggest mistake on the part of the commanders was that they awaited instructions from their superiors in relation to each projected action. The instructions, however, changed virtually every hour and were extremely contradictory."⁷¹ While this description of the situation faithfully reflected the contradictions, the outcome of the armed struggle had still to be decided.

A decisive turn could have been brought about in the armed struggle by the destruction of the strongest counter-revolutionary groups operating in *Corvin köz* and the Kilián Barracks. Preparations to do so were made in the early hours of October 28 by 280 men of the 5th Motorized Regiment and units of the 6th Motorized Regiment. They encircled both strongholds of the counter-revolutionaries in an operation planned to take both of them with the support of Soviet tanks and artillery. The Hungarian and Soviet commanders discussed the details of the operation, took up their respective starting positions and the artillery went into action. As the operation got under way at 5.30 a. m. a message was received that the operation had been cancelled and the units involved were ordered to return to base. The soldiers who were ready to fight were told that the counter-revolutionaries had laid down their arms.

Members of the Military Committee set up by the Central Leadership of the party elaborated with the cooperation of army officers a plan for the defence of people's power by arms by the morning of October 28. The plan envisaged a temporary take-over by the army, with military commissioners taking command of the individual regiments. A new government was to be formed following the routing and disarming of the armed gangs. Yet this plan could not be implemented.

A reply must be given to the question: what was the fundamental reason for the counter-revolution gaining a temporary upper hand, although the forces of socialism had

⁷¹Budapest Party Committee Archives. Csepel Iron and Steel Works. 6th Guard Regiment, p. 70.

fought remarkably well and were gradually developing their fighting strength.

The fundamental cause was clear. The party and the government did not give united leadership to the struggle against the counter-revolutionary revolt. That was how the specific situation was brought about: precisely when the armed struggle was about to be decided in favour of the forces of socialism, political manoeuvring behind the back of the socialist forces declared the victory of counter-revolutionary revolt.

During the months preceding October 23, the attack launched by the revisionist party opposition had focussed on disrupting party unity. The party leadership failed to meet these activities with consistent ideological struggle and the vacillating, retreating policy of the leadership contributed to the success of the disruptive forces. When launched, the counter-revolutionary armed attack encountered a party that was ideologically confused and hampered by the burden of conflicting political trends. Much the same applied to the Central Leadership. However, in the night of October 23 to 24 it appeared that the effort to create unity in action for the struggle against counter-revolution had been successful, and that this had been assisted by Imre Nagy and his followers. A new step forward in the direction of revolutionary development was taken in the early morning hours of October 25 when Ernő Gerő was relieved of his post as First Secretary of the party and Comrade János Kádár was elected to succeed him. Other measures designed to satisfy the justified demands of the working people were decided at the same time.

However, unity was short-lived; it failed to stand up to the test of struggle. Some members of the Central Leadership were politically bankrupt, while others were so deeply infected by revisionism that they ended up in treason. Instead of endeavouring to implement the action programme, many individual members of the Central Leadership adopted attitudes determined by their specific ideological and political positions or individual aspirations. In the first stage of the counter-revolution, there were three distinct groups and three tendencies in the Central Leadership.

One group embraced those Marxist-Leninists who had broken with the erroneous policies and rejected the crimes of the past. While understanding the interests of the working masses, this group grasped the fundamental fact that the first step towards the solution of the crisis had to be action to crush the armed enemy. This group correctly assessed the attitude of the masses and did not describe everyone as a counter-revolutionary. "It is characteristic of the grave situation in which we find ourselves that various elements are mixed up and combined in it. The demonstration by a section of our youth began as a peaceful move. The overwhelming majority of participants shared honest objectives. However, within a matter of a few hours, counter-revolutionary forces joining the demonstration had given it the character of an armed attack on the state power of the people's democracy... The armed attack against the power of our People's Republic must be repelled by all the means at our disposal," declared Comrade János Kádár in his speech broadcast on October 25.⁷²

While this was a correct stance, the Communists who agreed with it made no attempt to organize separately to have it carried out, because they were still unable to see clearly the nature of the Imre Nagy faction. As Communists with no personal interests differing from those of the general interest of party and people, they worked for unity to deal with the serious situation until events exposed the helplessness amounting to nearly treason of one group and the actual treason of the other.

The unity of the party, unity in its ranks in the service of the people are fundamental principles for Communists. That being the case, the need to make a break, even the mere thought of such a break, becomes an agonizing dilemma. And if the situation reaches a point at which there can no longer be any doubt that a break must be made, then the question becomes one of: When? Timing can be of decisive importance, as Comrade János Kádár explained at the First National Conference of the Hungarian Socialist Workers'

⁷²*Szabad Nép*, October 26, 1956.

Party: "...to a certain extent our situation was influenced and made worse by the circumstance that given these serious events, as long as it did not appear to be absolutely necessary, we were reluctant to take the very serious decision to reveal before the world that there is no unity among Communists in the highest leading organ of the party and the government."⁷³

The activities of this group had been gradually paralyzed by the conflict between left-wing and right-wing groups, and then the treason committed by Imre Nagy.

The second group was composed of leading personalities who had rallied around Ernő Gerő and Mátyás Rákosi. Primarily responsible for the serious errors that had been committed, they stuck to their posts but proved to be totally ineffective in the struggle against the counter-revolution. They did not become traitors, but their deviation from Marxism, inertia and impotence hampered the implementation of the action programme of the Central Leadership and the destruction of the counter-revolutionary centres.

The appeal for the restoration of order by Ernő Gerő on Hungarian Radio at 8 p. m. October 23 was rather one-sided: although it correctly defined the counter-revolutionary danger, its one-sided interpretation of events offended many honest people. On the evening of October 23, Gerő and his followers delayed as long as possible the convening of the Central Leadership. The sequence of Radio announcements that evening illustrates what took place. At 7.30 p. m. the Radio announced that a Central Leadership meeting had been convened for October 31. One hour later the news came that the Central Leadership would meet in a few days' time. At 10.22 p. m. it was announced that the Political Committee had called upon all members of the Central Leadership to convene an immediate meeting to discuss the present situation and the necessary measures. The Minister of Defence who was a member of the Political Committee

⁷³J. Kádár: *Szilárd népi hatalom: független Magyarország* (Firm People's Power: Independent Hungary). Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1962, p. 170.

told the Military Committee during the late hours of October 23 that he was unable to make weapons available for the arming of the workers. Two days later, the weapons were available but there was no adequate transport. A considerable number of the members of the Political Committee were opposed to giving the army units permission to use their weapons. To do so, they claimed, would be tantamount to taking the impermissible step of firing on the people. In this way they spread uncertainty, a feeling of helplessness and defeatism.

The Communists of the Third District of Budapest recorded how "early on the morning of October 24 comrades assembled at the local party building, ready to fight". But contradictory instructions were received from the central party headquarters; first a recommendation to "send the comrades home", then, in reply to repeated protests, a second instruction to "go out among the masses and agitate".⁷⁴

The majority of the Central Leadership were absolutely undecided whether to use arms to defeat the rebels or to try to put themselves "at the head of the masses". Thus, they could not fulfil the combat programme of the Central Leadership either; indeed they hampered the struggle of the revolutionary forces. They were an obstacle to the armed forces and their lack of confidence in the workers prevented the arming of the workers. The remnants of the Rákosi clique showed cowardice and helplessness in face of the need for struggle. Worse, they were afraid to give weapons to the workers. In these grave hours, many who had abused power, were unable to use that power to defend the genuine interests of the people. They failed the searching test of history for the second time, and under the most tragic conditions.

It is also true that by October 26 and 27 the most important representatives (with one or two exceptions) of the left-wing deviationists were already out of the leadership; they no longer represented any particular obstacle in the struggle. However, by that time the third group, Imre Nagy and his associates, had assumed the leading role in the events.

⁷⁴Budapest Party Committee Archives. IIIrd District Guards Regiment.

5.4. Imre Nagy and Radio Free Europe Call for the Withdrawal of Soviet Troops

As a first step the revisionists paralyzed the leadership; later they brought about the disintegration of the power of the proletariat.

Imre Nagy agreed with the action programme of the Central Leadership; that is why he and some of his followers were brought into the leadership. It was Imre Nagy who announced the declaration of martial law; he condemned the counter-revolutionary uprising and pledged the exercise of the full rigour of the law against those who continued their counter-revolutionary actions. He agreed with the participation of Soviet troops in putting down the revolt. In a radio broadcast on October 25, Imre Nagy said: "The Soviet troops whose intervention in the fighting was necessitated by the vital interests of our socialist system will be recalled immediately after peace, law and order are restored." Even the admirers of Imre Nagy in the West point out: "...there is evidence to indicate that he joined the resolution calling in the Russian tanks".⁷⁵ However, Imre Nagy and his group immediately embarked on practical activities designed to torpedo the implementation of the military action programme.

In the late hours of October 23, two pro-Imre Nagy centres were established. One was at the party's central headquarters where Ferenc Jánossy, Imre Nagy's son-in-law, leaders of the Petőfi Club, writers and journalists assembled to put pressure on the leadership and to paralyze the leading organ of the party. They involved the Central Leadership in constant debates and instead of backing military and political measures they underlined the necessity of a strictly political solution to the crisis. Betraying the armed struggle of the socialist forces and changing the earlier assessment of the nature of the uprising, these were the main goals of the revisionist group at this stage. "Imre Nagy was unable to act in any other way than he did, that is, he compelled the party

⁷⁵R. T. Holt: *op. cit.*, p. 188.

to go as far as could be achieved under the given conditions", is what his fellow traitor, Balázs Nagy wrote in the January 1960 issue of *Magyar Szemle* (Hungarian Review) in Brussels.

How to judge Imre Nagy's position and action? This question triggered off a debate in the ranks of his followers who fled to the West. One group, including Méray and his companions, criticized Imre Nagy for manoeuvring in the early days, instead of making a radical break with the party and openly going over to the rebels. Another view, shared by members of the Imre Nagy Institute (Brussels) held that Nagy had adopted the correct tactics of "concentrating his efforts on bringing the official line closer to that of the rebels". In other words, he "only" worked to have the party revise its initial judgements of the character of the uprising, and to achieve this without the need of a demonstrative break. In point of fact, this was how Imre Nagy did act in the first days.

"Workers' delegations" from the Writers' Association, from the universities, the rebels, etc. visited the group of Imre Nagy expressing support for these tactics. On October 26 the delegation of the Writers' Association had discussions with Ferenc Donáth, Géza Losonczy and then with Imre Nagy himself. "They were agreed on the major issues, in particular on that the uprising and the popular movement in sympathy with the uprising were on the whole of national democratic character..."⁷⁶ But they did not feel that this was the appropriate moment to reveal their agreement; they waited another two days before making it public.

The other pro-Imre Nagy centre operating at the Budapest Police Headquarters, directly obstructed armed struggle against the counter-revolutionary gangs. Tamás Aczél, Miklós Gimes, György Fazekas and others worked hard to convince the top police officers that what was going on was a national revolution which merited their support.

⁷⁶P. I. Archives. E. Gy. C/V/2. Shorthand minutes of the membership of the Writers' Association held on December 28, 1956.

They succeeded in winning over to their view and plans the chief of the police who distributed weapons to the counter-revolutionaries and ordered the release of captured rebels. Thus it happened several times that individuals and groups captured by military units were released by the police. This treachery had a disastrous effect on the morale of the armed forces fighting in defence of workers' power. Meantime representatives of the group had penetrated and spread confusion in the leadership of the army with the slogan: Don't fire on the people! This completely coincided with the attitude taken by the previous leadership dominated by fear and panic.

Relying on his power Imre Nagy was able to block the armed suppression of the counter-revolution. Martial law was not put into effect; it was postponed several times. On October 25 Nagy lifted the curfew and called upon the working people to go back to work. From then onwards the armed counter-revolutionaries were able to move freely. On October 28 at 5.30 a. m. he threatened to resign if the decisive military action against the counter-revolutionary base at *Corvin köz* was not called off.

Imre Nagy and his group exerted enormous pressure on the Central Leadership, and on individual members to get them revise the initial assessment of the situation. In the afternoon of October 27, the Central Leadership went into a session without including, in the first part of the meeting, the members of the Military Committee. Imre Nagy and his companions called for the cancellation of military action against the rebels. They regarded only a political solution as acceptable and feasible. The Central Leadership was already hesitating and it was inclined to accept negotiations as a way out. However, about 5 p. m. the members of the Military Committee also joined the meeting and, as a result of their participation, the Central Leadership decided to continue the armed struggle. The Military Committee was given a vote of confidence. However, at the October 28 meeting of the Central Leadership a different decision was taken. This meeting took place against a background of utter confusion; successive delegations streaming in and out of the

building, reports of treachery by military officers and the impossibility of obtaining a clear picture of the situation—all these factors operated in favour of the revisionist opposition. Imre Nagy and his supporters sharply attacked those who continued to fight the armed gangs. Blindly intent on assuming full power they described those defending people's power as murderers. Referring to a nationalist concept of national unity they called for and succeeded in changing the Central Leadership's judgement of the events. A major role in this development was played by an editorial in the October 28 issue of *Szabad Nép* entitled "True to Justice". This article described the uprising as a "national democratic movement" already before the Central Leadership met and adopted the resolution advocated by Imre Nagy.

In effect two uprisings were taking place in Hungary simultaneously: one went on in the streets by counter-revolutionaries using arms, the other took place within the party by Imre Nagy and his companions by using debate, demands, pressure and treason. Without the latter it would have been impossible for the former to gain the day.

It was not the armed uprising but treason that achieved victory when the "Communist" Prime Minister Imre Nagy went on Radio on October 28 to declare an immediate, general cease-fire and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest: "The government rejects the views according to which the vast popular movement taking place now is a counter-revolution..." Nagy described the counter-revolution as a national democratic movement which aimed at guaranteeing "our national independence, self-determination and sovereignty..." Then he announced "...the government will give support to the new, democratic autonomous bodies created on the initiative of the people and will aim at integrating them into state administration". In an act of extreme betrayal of the forces loyal to socialism he announced the creation of a new security force formed from "the units of the army, police as well as the armed units of workers and youth".⁷⁷

⁷⁷*Szabad Nép*, October 29, 1956.

These statements of Imre Nagy paralyzed the struggle of both the armed forces and persons loyal to socialism.

The Prime Minister declared that the counter-revolutionaries, fascists, criminals, reactionaries and murderers were revolutionaries. In the opinion of this "Communist" Prime Minister every worker, peasant and soldier struggling to defend people's power, law and order became a counter-revolutionary. Thereby one of the foulest acts of treachery in Hungarian history was committed: the Prime Minister attacked from the rear the very power he had sworn to defend; a power which had raised him to his high and distinguished post. Nagy betrayed the trust that people's power had placed in him.

"Withdrawal of the Soviet troops, was the key to the situation in Hungary", as Imre Nagy's friends have documented.⁷⁸ Indeed, this came first in all lists of counter-revolutionary demands. Both the external and domestic enemy were well aware of the fact that as long as Soviet troops were stationed on the territory of the People's Republic of Hungary it would be impossible for the counter-revolution to seize power. The armed rebels were aware that they were not strong enough to gain the upper hand in street fighting. As long as the Soviet troops were present it was always possible for the forces of socialism to withdraw temporarily, regroup and launch a counter offensive. The presence of the Soviet troops also limited the possibilities of external intervention. Reactionary emigrés were rushing to Hungary, truckloads of arms and ammunition were dispatched, but major military assistance could not be given to the revolt. The enormous risk involved had the effect of a deterrent.

In his book "Dulles over Suez", Professor Herman Finer of Chicago University writes of how in the last days of October 1956, some of John Foster Dulles' advisors, under the pressure of the moment, advocated American intervention in Hungary. Other advisors, he continues, demurred, invoking the horrifying holocaust of a thermonuclear war. There can be no doubt about the fact that the presence of Soviet

troops in Hungary prevented certain circles from embarking on a vast, frightful adventure: overt and large-scale intervention.

Both imperialism and the Hungarian counter-revolutionaries recognized that a small nation engaged in socialist construction was incapable of defending its independence, its freedom and socialist achievements in the face of a concentrated open attack launched by international imperialism and the domestic reactionary forces without the assistance of the Soviet Union, especially if its ranks were in a disarray because of internal treason. That is why they chose the method of unbridled incitement as the main line of their propaganda activities in an effort to turn the Hungarian people against the Soviet Union and achieve the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary.

The "Popular Opposition Centre in the Free World" knew only too well in 1956 that the Soviet troops were stationed on Hungarian territory legally, under a valid international agreement and they were entitled to participate in combating the uprising. On October 25, the New York headquarters of the Radio Free Europe Commission was quite candid about what they saw as the only way to obtain a Soviet withdrawal. "It can only be effected by the resolute stand of Hungarian leaders actually in office. Imre Nagy is the only hope." Indeed he was the only person able to achieve the withdrawal of Soviet troops; as Prime Minister of Hungary he had the authority and the masses continued to believe him to be a Communist.

In the first phase of the counter-revolution many were confused by Radio Free Europe's contradictory pronouncements on Imre Nagy. Usually he was under attack. But this was a result of Radio Free Europe in Munich failing consistently to carry out the instructions from New York. On October 24, for example, New York said: "That Nagy called upon foreign troops to restore 'order' is a fact he will have to live down. He can live it down only by keeping his promises." The instruction received from New York on October 25 stated that "Who called in the Soviet troops is less important than the question of whether Nagy can and will

⁷⁸M. Molnár and L. Nagy: *op. cit.*, p. 143.

fulfil his promise to try to have all Soviet troops withdrawn for good". Thus the instructions gave priority to support for and not criticism of Imre Nagy, even if the actual transmissions from Radio Free Europe reversed the order of importance.

On October 25 special commentary No. 4 transmitted by Radio Free Europe ended on the note that the government led by Imre Nagy might still prove to be a good one. In another transmission a life line was thrown to Imre Nagy: the Radio Free Europe newscasters said they did not yet know the conditions under which the "shameful decree" had been signed or the extent to which Imre Nagy, the person in whose name it was imposed, had been involved in making the decision. They added that it was certain that martial law had been pushed through by the "Stalinists". A few days later Imre Nagy's own group began to propagate the same lie throughout Hungary. At the same time, the heavy attacks on Imre Nagy in other Radio Free Europe broadcasts did his image a great deal of good in the eyes of honest people. On October 25, for instance, special commentary No. 9 condemned him for having agreed to call on Soviet troops for assistance. Andor Gellért, then Chief Editor of Radio Free Europe, took the microphone himself to describe Imre Nagy as "the greatest traitor in all Hungarian history".⁷⁹ Imre Nagy was delayed coming forward with his own explanation because the break-up of revolutionary leadership in Hungary had not yet been accomplished. For this reason, all his new measures, including his call for a cease-fire, were given a critical reception by Radio Free Europe, followed by new demands on him. On October 29 Radio Free Europe in tones of new hysteria told the counter-revolutionaries to refuse to lay down their arms "...those who hold the weapons hold the power!" "Do not lay aside your guns!" It demanded a new government and gave the counter-revolutionaries tactical instructions on occupying the ministries directing the armed forces.

If Imre Nagy neither recognized their real nature nor op-

⁷⁹R. T. Holt: *op. cit.*, pp. 188-189.

posed the reactionary flood, it was not for lack of clearly stated purpose by the reactionary forces. However, Nagy did fulfil the expectations of the New York headquarters of Radio Free Europe when he announced in a radio broadcast on October 28 that the Soviet troops would begin to leave Budapest in response to his demand for withdrawal.

5.5. The Second Phase of the Counter-Revolution: Restoration and "Neutrality"

The second stage of the counter-revolution began on October 29 and 30. In those two days concealed counter-revolutionary reactionary forces came into the open. Under cover of the terror instituted by the armed rebels, reactionary and semi-fascist political circles openly began to organize with the aim of seizing power. A host of demands and programmes reflected the dual, but unified goal of counter-revolution in its second stage. 1. To broaden the counter-revolutionary process; to organize the unity of all the reactionary forces; to capture the positions of power and to start the restoration of a social order based upon private property. 2. To detach Hungary from the community of the socialist countries; to tie her with as many threads as possible to the capitalist world, and to convert her into a base for political or military struggle against the socialist countries, above all, against the Soviet Union.

It would go well beyond the scope of this book to attempt a description of the whole social movement in the second phase. Instead we shall limit ourselves to a summarized description of the actions and measures taken by counter-revolution to attain its dual goal. This should clarify the extent to which the progress of counter-revolution served the interests of international imperialism.⁸⁰

⁸⁰A thoroughgoing and profound analysis of the counter-revolution is given by J. Molnár in his book entitled: *Ellenforradalom Magyarországon 1956-ban* (Counter-Revolution in Hungary in 1956). Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest 1967.

The counter-revolutionary forces were jubilant at the news of the agreed withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest. They regarded it as a partial but important victory. Later there was to be much debate over the issue of whether or not it was absolutely necessary to withdraw Soviet forces from Budapest on October 29 and 30, whether it would have been wiser to seek another solution?

The traitors active in the leadership had brought the forces of the socialist revolution close to the point of disintegration.⁸¹ The revolutionary forces were in disarray, helpless and unable to take action because the treason had not been completely exposed and in the confusion it was hard to tell where people stood or where they were heading. Imre Nagy and his associates still talked of socialism and described themselves as Communists. On October 28 and 29 they presented their actions as a defence of socialism, stating that they had only chosen a different solution to the crisis. They argued that there should be an end to bloodshed and then the factors influencing events in the direction of consolidation could be brought into play. All this prevented Soviet troops from taking effective action. Demonstrations of strength were no longer of any value. It was impossible to go over immediately to military suppression of the centres of armed counter-revolution when by a combination of threats, ultimatums or direct cooperation with the armed gangs, the traitors had successfully blocked every attempt to act decisively.

The forces of socialism were compelled to withdraw and gain time to assess the situation, examine the possibilities of socialist consolidation and to decide whether a counter attack should be made. And if yes, how and when. Soviet troops left Budapest as part of a temporary withdrawal from the scene. They left the city but took up positions around Budapest.

On October 30 the Soviet government issued a statement that showed there could be a political solution and indicated the direction in which it lay. It analyzed the development of

relations between the socialist countries, identified problematic irregularities, and summarized the basic principles of cooperation and unity. The Soviet government underlined that on the basis of the common ideas of building socialist society and the principles of proletarian internationalism it was prepared to promote the further strengthening of friendship and cooperation between the socialist countries. To that end it proposed talks between the governments of the socialist countries; these took place at the end of 1956 and in early 1957.

The Soviet government took a firm stand in the Warsaw Treaty then under a concerted attack by all the reactionary forces. The Soviet Union emphasized the importance of the political and military commitment which had been undertaken by the member states of the Warsaw Treaty to adopt the "agreed measures to strengthen their defensive power in order to protect the peaceful labour of their peoples; to guarantee the inviolability of their frontiers and territories and to provide for defence against any aggression". This was an indirect warning to the Hungarian government that the stationing of the forces of any state party to the Warsaw Treaty on the territory of a given member state was done on the basis of an agreement between all the member states and with the consent of the given member state. It followed that withdrawal of such forces required a joint position by all states party to the agreement. By emphasizing the above point the Soviet government warned that it would be unwise to take ill-considered and unilateral steps that could lead to irresponsible adventurism, endangering socialism in Hungary and simultaneously posing a serious threat to the peace and security of the socialist community as a whole.

The statement issued by the Soviet government expressed support for the justified demands of the Hungarian working people but at the same time it gave a sincere warning when it noted: "This progressive movement of the working people was soon joined by forces of dark reaction and counter-revolution seeking to exploit the dissatisfaction of a section of the working people in order to undermine the foundations of the people's democratic system in Hungary and to restore

⁸¹J. Kádár: *op. cit.*, p. 169.

the old regime of landowners and capitalists". At the same time, the Soviet government made it clear that the only development it was ready to support in Hungary was socialist development, and went on to make a direct appeal to the Hungarian working people: "The defence of the socialist achievements of People's Democratic Hungary is today the paramount and sacred obligation of the workers, peasants and intellectuals, of all the Hungarian working people."

"The Soviet government expresses confidence that the peoples of the socialist countries will not allow external and internal reactionary forces to shake the foundations of the people's democratic system, won and consolidated by the selfless struggles and labour of the workers, peasants and intellectuals of each country."

The government led by Imre Nagy understood neither the counsel nor the warning contained in the statement. Internationalist persons in whom Imre Nagy and his faction had no confidence were steadily being omitted from the government after each daily reshuffle. The march of events demonstrated that the counter-revolutionary process could not be halted by making concessions. Reaction was on the offensive and it could not be blocked without destroying its forces.

Following the declaration of the cease-fire on October 28, the external hostile forces also proceeded to assess the situation and to adjust both line and tactics accordingly. The next steps were dictated by the Radio Free Europe Commission.

On October 28 the New York headquarters of the Radio Free Europe Commission cabled back to Munich what it felt ought to be the minimum conditions acceptable to the freedom fighters. The cabled instructions summarized the demands in eight points.

- "1. Immediate and total withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Hungarian territory.
2. Total dissolution of the *ÁVH* [State Security Force] immediately. Control of any new police or security forces and the army should be in the hands of a minister not associated with any previous cabinet or central Communist body.

3. Full amnesty to all freedom fighters who participated in the uprising.
4. Exclusion from the new provisional government of all persons associated in any way with the regime, government, or top party command since Imre Nagy's previous premiership.
5. The majority of the cabinet of the new provisional government to be drawn from various patriotic groups on a representative basis.
6. Immediate calling of a Constituent Assembly, selected by free secret popular vote, to frame a new charter of government and an action programme. Charter and programme to be submitted for acceptance or rejection by the people in free, secret voting within a stated period, such as six months.
7. Hungary to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact.
8. Continuation of the local workers' and other councils and patriotic committees formed during the crisis and continuous communication between them, until all the above conditions have been achieved.

A special commentary from Munich on October 29 carried these demands in full."⁸²

The response in Hungary was immediate. The eight points became the basis of the demands voiced by armed and political counter-revolutionary organizations. One of the counter-revolutionary political groups, the Hungarian National Revolutionary Committee led by Dudás, published its 25 points in *Magyar Függetlenség* (Hungarian Independence) on October 30. They were based upon the eight points broadcast by Radio Free Europe. The demands were carried by their paper under the headline: "We Refuse to Recognize the Present Government". Some of the major points were:

- "...3. We request the United Nations Security Council to send material and if necessary military aid for the defence of Hungary's independence.

⁸²R. T. Holt: *op. cit.*, p. 191.

4. The Hungarian people and the National Revolutionary Council revoke Hungary's participation in the Warsaw Treaty... The Russians must withdraw from Hungarian territory immediately under white flags.
5. Hungary declares her neutrality.
6. We observe the cease-fire. But we are not laying down our arms...
7. The freedom fighters are entitled to act in defence of the freedom that has been won anywhere, at any time and against anyone...
11. A new provisional government must be formed.
16. Democratic parties can be established in Hungary; they can begin activities immediately without interference by any agency...
19. Immediate dissolution of the ÁVH..."

Premier Imre Nagy received Dudás and the delegation of the "freedom fighters" on October 30. The Hungarian News Agency MTI reported "the talks are taking place in a favourable atmosphere and the demands of the insurgents will be submitted to the government by Imre Nagy, chairmen of the Council of Ministers". The demands presented by the "alternative government" formed on October 30, the Transdanubian National Council, were listed in the October 31 issue of *Új Fehérvár* (New White Fort). For a change, demands were condensed into 14 points only. These are some of the most important ones:

- "1. After the departure of Soviet troops, but not later than the end of January 1957, the government must hold general and secret elections with the participation of several parties...
11. The freedom fighters must be represented in the new government...
12. The government must proclaim the neutrality of Hungary in the United Nations...
14. Unless the government meets these important principles and demands, we shall not recognize it even as a provisional body..."

These examples are sufficient to show how intervention from abroad, and above all, the role played by Radio Free

Europe in this respect intensified in the second phase. In an exceptional situation the role of this type of propaganda is heightened to a tremendous degree, and this applied to the role of Radio Free Europe in the abnormal atmosphere prevailing in Hungary during October 1956. When they feel that their lives, their own and their homeland's future are at stake, people are hungry for news, expect to have situation and events explained, and analyzed. Not only the active counter-revolutionaries listened to the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe. In many places, especially in the villages and towns of Transdanubia, the mushrooming local counter-revolutionary committees mounted loudspeakers in the main squares to relay Radio Free Europe transmissions. That was the case, for example, in Lenti where the news broadcasts of Radio Free Europe were amplified by loudspeakers. In Várpalota, a mining town in Transdanubia, released prisoners relayed the programmes of Radio Free Europe from the local studio. A characteristic event took place in the city of Vác where the counter-revolutionary "mayor" sent instructions in writing on October 30 to the head of the local post office "to include Radio Free Europe in the news service of the radio". The local "free radio stations" which sprang up in several places during the counter-revolution (in Győr, Miskolc, etc.) also borrowed programmes from Radio Free Europe and broadcast news bulletins and programmes which followed the line set by the "main source" of information. The radio station in Miskolc even announced on October 30 that it was in direct contact with Radio Free Europe. Naturally, Radio Free Europe was only too happy to relay and amplify the broadcast of these local "free radio stations" whose anti-Soviet line and incitement corresponded completely to its own goals. All technical facilities Radio Free Europe had at its disposal were used to amplify these local stations; and in early November it established new monitoring and amplifying stations in the vicinity of Hungary's western borders.

On October 31 Radio Free Europe was of the opinion that the counter-revolutionaries were progressing on the right road to eventual victory. Based on its analysis of the si-

tuation, the following message was dispatched to New York: "...it appears possible that multiparty democracy may be restored to Hungary and that Hungary may be able to assume a position of freedom and neutrality on the Austrian pattern."⁸³

Bourgeois "democracy" and "neutrality" were the two rallying calls through which they hoped to achieve their objectives. "Neutrality" was actually declared but as for "democracy", the counter-revolution proved quite unable to come to a stop in the "democratic" stage and ended up in White Terror.

5.6. Action to Liquidate Workers' Power

The armed counter-revolutionary gangs also demonstrated their own particular programmatic way out: On October 30, under cover of the cease-fire and following the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Budapest they attacked the headquarters of the Budapest Party Committee at *Köztársaság tér*.

All the major armed groups participated in what was a military well-planned and coordinated attack. They encircled the building and opened fire on a prearranged signal. The guards on duty at the headquarters and the party workers inside the building resisted for several hours. Meanwhile, they sent several requests for help to various authorities, even to Imre Nagy himself. Ex-partisans who were prepared to go to the aid of the defenders were told that military units were already on the spot. The soldiers were told that units of the special volunteer police had been sent to help. The volunteers were told that the ex-partisans were on their way to the party headquarters. All those ready to go to the aid of the party headquarters were persuaded that their presence would only confuse and hinder the relief of the defenders. Meanwhile the counter-revolutionaries entered the building and began merciless bloodshed. During the siege

⁸³R. T. Holt: *op. cit.*, p. 192.

Imre Mező, the secretary of the Budapest Party Committee, a veteran of many class struggles and battles, was fatally wounded just as he was about to end the hopeless defence in order to save the lives of the handful of defenders.

The counter-revolutionary press offered as reasons for the attack that the Budapest party headquarters had been the last stronghold of the *ÁVH* [State Security Force] and that the "freedom fighters" had been subjected to provocation. It is indicative of the cumulative effect of unscrupulous propaganda that crowds of onlookers gathered to watch excavating machines tearing up the square in a search for secret passages under the building. The newspapers had spread the lie that there were "secret tunnels" where captive patriots were held and casements where *ÁVH* were in hiding. Needless to say nothing was found, there were no secret passages or casements, but the campaign of lies continued regardless.

In fact the guard at the headquarters was a platoon of young conscripts under the command of two lieutenants from the security forces. Also in the building were 30 to 40 civilians, party workers. The conscripts, 21 to 23 years old, from working-class or peasant families fought heroically to defend the building. They had not provoked anyone before the attack was launched.⁸⁴

One of the real reasons for the attack was the goal of destroying a centre engaged in organizing workers' resistance to counter-revolution. In the evening of October 29, János Kádár had visited Imre Mező at the Budapest Party Headquarters. Comrades and friends of long standing, they discussed the situation which had made necessary the organization of a new revolutionary centre and the formation of units of armed workers. At the same time, seven army officers, under the personal direction of Imre Mező, began to organize the arming of workers.⁸⁵

⁸⁴Budapest Party Committee Archives. Records Concerning the Attack on the Budapest Party Headquarters.

⁸⁵Comrade Imre Mező's participation in the organization of the struggle against the counter-revolution was described in detail in a book by I. Komját entitled "Imre Mező", published in 1968 by Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest.

The other even more important objective of the offensive was to deliver a demonstrative blow at the party and to intimidate the forces loyal to socialism. The counter-revolutionaries intended to show that they would not be bound by the cease-fire until they had eliminated all bases of support for the party. On the same day armed gangs stormed the police and party buildings in the Tenth District of Budapest because their personnel had been able to maintain order in the District. The attacks on October 30 were the signal for a broad offensive against progressives and the start of general persecution of Communists.

In the meantime hundreds of "freedom calls" were issued by the different "revolutionary" committees and terror ran rampant on the streets. The campaign of misleading propaganda continued, the press and radio pouring out a flood of emotional reports, articles, news stories, and features about revolution, freedom and democracy. One report on the newly established Fliers Association and the passionate determination of its members to fly in a "free country, on free wings and in a free air" must have brought tears of pride to the eyes of many of its readers. A myriad committees promoted the ends of the "free press", "free church", "democratic democracy", "free freedom" and the like. However, under cover of these noble sounding phrases about freedom, the persecution of people loyal to socialism began. In village and town hundreds of elected officials were arrested along with army officers and Communists. In the town of Kaposvár, 64 persons including 13 army officers were detained on October 31. Throughout the country 3,000 people were being held, and there were 10,000 names on the various death lists the counter-revolution had compiled. Among the witnesses of the ensuing horrors were Austrian and German trade union delegates who arrived in Budapest on October 31. Although their sympathies were with the insurgents they recorded this scene. "An excited, incoherent group of people whose gestures indicated that they intended to lynch someone who had fallen into their hands. Within minutes the adversary they had captured was swinging in the cool

autumn breeze, from a rope thrown over the branch of a tree."⁸⁶

Even the counter-revolutionary press admitted to the fact of White Terror. The October 30 issue of *Magyar Szabadság* (Hungarian Freedom) wrote: "...there are reports on the desk before us, but we hardly dare believe our eyes. Reliable evidence of vandalism and slaughter." The same paper wrote on November 1: "In several Csongrád villages irresponsible elements attempted to set fire to buildings..." The November 2 issue of *Keszthelyi Újság* (Keszthely Paper) wrote "people are assaulted in the streets". However, these papers were not protesting against the White Terror as such. They were advocating the need to dress what was being done in a cloak of legitimacy. *Új Magyarország* (New Hungary) wrote reassuringly on November 2: "Our police render harmless the enemies of the national revolution... the mopping up operation has begun under the control of the Revolutionary Special Forces Committee."

The "mopping up operation" had begun in the factories and institutions as well. In the name of "freedom and democracy" those who did not sympathize with the committee callers, loud talkers, turn-coats and former exploiters who had become "workers" were dismissed. Hundreds of honest people were banned from their places of employment, but there were also more sophisticated places at which they were asked "to quit on their own". Armed and physical threats were soon complemented by intimidation of the conscience and material existence.

The main effort of the counter-revolutionary leaders now concentrated on gaining control and reorganizing the armed forces. At the army units soldiers' councils were formed on October 30 and 31, the overwhelming majority of which were dominated by old, reactionary-minded officers, careerists, human chameleons. At the same time, commanders prominent in the defence of workers' power were arrested, others were dismissed at short notice.

⁸⁶*Four Days of Freedom*. Published by the International Federation of Free Trade-Unions. Brussels, 1958, p. 86.

The principal objective of the officers who had gone over to the side of the counter-revolutionaries was to establish a centre to take charge of the counter-revolutionary reorganization of the armed forces. The retrospective rhetoric of General Béla Király, who organized the counter-revolutionary armed forces illustrated this objective: "In the second phase of the revolution the armed forces had to be transformed so as to become loyal organs of Imre Nagy's government. Finally, the specific new defence institutions of the revolution had to be organized."⁸⁷

One of the new institutions, the Preparatory Committee of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, was formed in the early hours of October 30. Radio Kossuth Budapest reported that Premier Imre Nagy had acknowledged its formation and confirmed its operation on the same day. Within the army the "Revolutionary Defence Committee of the Republic of Hungary" led by Béla Király and Pál Maléter was established on October 31. As a result, the conspirators involved in the revolt, the remnants of the ancient (Horthy) regime, the traitors and criminals had become the official, security armed forces of the government. On orders issued by Béla Király and Pál Maléter tens of thousands of weapons (mainly sub-machine guns, light machine guns and handgrenades) were transported to the rebel bases from the army arsenals and barracks.

Also the transformation of the state administration began in order to ensure the influence of the counter-revolution. Local councils had been destroyed practically everywhere by October 30 and several council chairmen had been murdered. Imre Nagy approved of the incorporation of the counter-revolutionary councils and committees into the power setup as he stated in his radio address on October 30: "...the government recognizes all autonomous democratic, local authorities created by the revolution, we rely on them and we ask for their support."

Yielding to the constant pressure and insistent demands of the counter-revolutionary forces, Imre Nagy embarked

upon the gradual reshuffling of his government and the elimination of what remained of workers' power at the centre. This is how his biographers describe his attitude at that time: "He waged a struggle not for so-called 'socialist freedom', but simply for freedom in the conventional sense of the word or, strangely enough, in a bourgeois democratic sense of the term as well."⁸⁸ Accordingly, he announced on October 30, "the cabinet abolishes the one-party system and places the country's government on the foundation of democratic cooperation between coalition parties as they existed in 1945". When this declaration was made, Imre Nagy was able to cite in its support the final decision taken by the leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party. It had dissolved the HWPP and called for the formation of a new party. The followers of Imre Nagy had been in the majority at the Presidium which voted for this decision. With two exceptions, they made up the seven member committee set up to organize the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

Imre Nagy himself established a smaller inner Cabinet within the government as a first step, and later relieved the Communist ministers of their posts. On November 2 and 3 he reshuffled his government again. This new "coalition" led by Imre Nagy satisfied by and large even the demands of the armed counter-revolutionaries. Pál Maléter became the Minister of Defence. The list of ministers included János Kádár but he was no longer in Budapest. He had already broken with the group of traitors headed by Nagy. The Prime Minister was well aware of this fact because on November 2 and 3 he sent for Comrade Kádár, whose wife and one or two of his aides were in custody in the Parliament building. When he included him on the government list, Imre Nagy abused the name of Comrade Kádár in an effort to mislead Communists and workers.

The necessity for and conditions of the existence of political parties are not determined by a sort of "general human nature" but by the given historical circumstances and class power relations. Socialism can be built with a one-party or a

⁸⁷Új Látóhatár (New Horizon), September 1966.

⁸⁸M. Molnár and L. Nagy: *op. cit.*, p. 138.

multi-party system under the leadership of a party based upon Marxism-Leninism. That is why it is essential to examine in every case the actual historical conditions in order to be able to understand the role of the parties.

The gradual reduction followed by the eventual elimination in 1949 of the democratic political parties accepting the programme of socialist construction was an erroneous step. Under the leadership of the party of the working class these parties would have been able to play an important role in educating and mobilizing various social strata in the building of socialism. The patriotic people's front movement taking the place of the various parties had many drawbacks; consequently it could not fill the gaps left by the elimination of the parties. The tensions that had arisen could not be resolved even after the former leaders of these parties who had accepted the programme of socialist construction sincerely, found their place in different areas of social and political life.

The reorganization of the parties had been consistently carried on by the banner of reaction. The former party leaders opposed to socialism began to organize either illegally or semi-legally. The organs of international imperialism included the demand for a multi-party system in the "liberation" programme. On May 15, 1956, Radio Free Europe formulated the slogan: "Let democratic parties operate!" It regularly slandered the National Assembly and People's Democracy. The message of its programmes was that as long as there was "no opposition and no parties" there could be no democracy in Hungary. The early days of November saw the mushroom growth of parties of all kind. Close on seventy sprang up practically overnight. Simultaneously, the counter-revolutionary offensive was launched on workers' power and White Terror was unleashed against progressive people, against Communists. The former coalition parties were needed by this bourgeois dictatorship to act as a cover and as a supporting "democratic" disguise.

The reorganization of the former coalition parties, such as the Social Democratic Party, the Independent Smallholders' Party and the National Peasant Party was launched by

"non-compromised" leaders, in other words, persons who had disagreed with the implementation of workers' power earlier and had been opposed to the building of socialism. As early as during the re-establishment of these parties they began to bicker over the division of spoils and on the programme to be implemented. Those favouring bourgeois restoration were increasingly vocal and exerted growing influence.

János Csorba, one of the leaders of the Smallholders' Party, described the party's programme in the paper *Igazság* (Truth) in its November 1 issue: "The Smallholders' Party wants a new coalition government on the basis of the 1945 party proportions. We want a new Hungarian constitution and the cancellation of the Presidential Council—in fact a republic instead of the People's Republic." The local party leaders also formulated their goals quite openly and frankly. According to a circular issued by the leadership of the Győr-Sopron County branch of the Independent Smallholders' Party on October 31, the party "was based upon the bourgeois way of life and on the principle of unconditional private property". The circular stated "it is an unconditional supporter of private enterprise and economy". This is what was meant by the terms "1945 party proportions" and "republic".

József Pásztor, a Social Democratic leader announced: "...the Social Democratic Party is not merely the party of ordinary people but it is open to anyone who is prepared to accept its programme. It accepts private property". The statement was carried by the *Szabolcs-Szatmár Népe* (The People of County Szabolcs-Szatmár) on November 2.

Honest people defending or wanting to defend socialist achievements also made their appearance in the parties, but in the swelling reactionary flood they were increasingly silenced and eventually isolated.

Parties and organizations openly favouring restoration and proclaiming their reactionary policies were formed in great numbers and embarked on the struggle to power. On October 31 the formation of the National Bloc of Non-Party People was announced. Its demands included: "Police

surveillance must be imposed on former partisans... the Communist party and the trade unions must be banned from the factories." "We represent the bourgeois ideas" is proclaimed in the minutes of the founding meeting of the Hungarian Independence Party led by Pfeiffer. Here are two noteworthy points from the party's programme: "4. Inviolability of private property... 6. Implementation of pure, eternal and bourgeois democracy." The newly formed parties included the Christian Democratic Party, Christian Hungarian Party, Catholic People's Party, Hungarian Revolutionary Youth Party. There were quite a few Catholic parties. One interesting piece of information was published in the press on November 1: "The provisional leadership of the Christian Front, after ten years of underground activity, will hold its first meeting on Friday afternoon. The Christian Front was established with the objective of unifying all the Christian political groupings and parties." This was the same organization we discussed earlier in relation to the illegal youth movement led by priests and former monks.

In the second phase of the counter-revolution, Cardinal Mindszenty was the centre around which the most reactionary forces rallied. He carried the hopes of the external and domestic restoration forces, he was their symbol. And he was only too happy to play this role. When he was released from house arrest on October 30, he made the following statement: "I will continue at the point where I was forced to stop eight years ago." At that time he was the intellectual leader and the political flag bearer of the extreme reactionary forces, the arch enemies of social progress and socialism.

Glorification of Cardinal Mindszenty was not missing from the propaganda of international imperialism for even one day. Meetings were held, processions were organized and funds were raised for the purposes of "liberation" under his name. As from the summer of 1956, repeated attempts were made with growing intensity to make people aware that "Mindszenty is the intellectual leader and ideal of the whole nation". After the publication of the party's July programme, Radio Rome said on July 24: "After the

fall of Rákosi, Gerő means no more than a provisional stage... the future does not lie with these people, it lies with Prince Primate Mindszenty who has been consistently anti-Communist." On September 5, Radio Free Europe demanded that "the most innocent political prisoner, Cardinal Mindszenty be rehabilitated." In that period his name was mentioned every day so that domestic reaction should be aware of him constantly.

It is, therefore, quite obvious that on the morning of November 1 the meeting held in President Eisenhower's study approved a report submitted by Allen Dulles: "The problem in Hungary is that the insurgents lack a forceful, authoritative leader! Imre Nagy is failing, and the insurgents are demanding his resignation. Cardinal Mindszenty, if supported by the Roman Catholic ardour of the Hungarian people, could be that leader. Newspapers this morning are reporting his release from house arrest and his return to Budapest."⁸⁹ This is how President Eisenhower recalled the meeting in his memoirs. Thereby the second phase of the counter-revolution had been approved also by the highest level of the United States Administration.

Radio Free Europe immediately embarked upon the implementation of the second phase of the great American project. Following his release, Cardinal Mindszenty received a four-member delegation of the "Hungarian" section of the Radio Free Europe Commission which included Bálint Czupi, Baron Antal Radvánszky, Lajos Hajdú-Németh and Árpád Baksányi who discussed with him the organization of a Roman Catholic political movement. "Incidentally, this corresponded to the American requirements as well since the order of the day, 'Build up Mindszenty!' had just arrived from Washington. They wanted to make him Prime Minister of Hungary in an effort to begin the building up of a state in which the big landowners and the church

⁸⁹D. D. Eisenhower: *The White House Years*. Vol. 2: *Waging Peace*, 1956-1961. New York 1965, p. 82.

were to regain their estates and privileges. That was the goal of the political Catholicism of Radio Free Europe."⁹⁰

In Hungary the message was understood. According to a report by *Igazság* (Truth), on the morning of October 31 "the first meeting of the Hungarian Revolutionaries' Party was held at *Rákóczi tér*. The principal speaker was István Illés who called for the formation of a government to be led by József Mindszenty". After the meeting the participants went to Parliament Square to demonstrate in support of their demand for a "Mindszenty government". Mindszenty's Budapest residence had become a headquarters. The reactionary politicians met there; Mindszenty had discussions with government representatives, he had telephone conversations with people abroad and made two phone calls to Washington as well. Liaison people were going to his residence in large numbers. They included delegations of the Swiss and West German Red Cross organizations and Prince Löwenstein. The Vatican also sent its representatives: "Monseigneur Rodhain, the envoy of the Holy See, reached as far as the capital city where he had talks with Cardinal Mindszenty who had just been released from house arrest by Imre Nagy's government. After he had been made familiar with the situation the envoy handed the sum sent by the Pope for the Hungarian Catholics to the Cardinal and then returned to the Vatican bringing highly valuable secret documents from Budapest. Not long after, a similar trip was made by Monseigneur Zágón, the rector of the Papal Hungarian Institute."⁹¹

Following a series of talks held with a wide variety of people, Mindszenty presented his programme for the restoration of capitalism in a radio address on the evening of November 3.

⁹⁰Horváth and Vámos: *Tiltakozás!* (Protest). *Látóhatár*, February 1962.

⁹¹*Journal de Genève*, December 13, 1956.

5.7. The Reality of "Neutral Hungary"

Following the dissolution of the party, the Communist leaders withdrew to organize a new centre. They had to consider how to act when all arms were in the hands of reaction which terrorized the socialist forces. The means of propaganda, the media, the radio, the press, leaflets, and so on, served the purposes of the uprising. A flood of words drowned out any other view. People, especially youth were carried away by the gale of revolutionary romanticism. It made them incapable of identifying the actual forces underlying the events. Reality for them consisted of the rattle of arms, the atmosphere of blood letting in the wake of the "people's judgement", the flying of the national flag, the excitement of demonstrations and the emotions of the repeated singing of the national anthem. The string of appeals and lists of demands, busy organizational activities, the formation of political parties, and the declaiming of statements, all made in the name of the people combined to create illusions about freedom.

The crime of writers and journalists who regarded themselves as national Communists lies in the fact that at this time of the real danger of bourgeois restoration they supplied the ideological foundations for the misleading propaganda. From the writers came the slogan: "We are a small people, but we are struggling for one world." This represented false pride, nationalist pseudo-heroism and the idea that a neutral middle-of-the-road policy was feasible. The members of the group led by Imre Nagy published two papers in those days, *Igazság* (Truth) and *Magyar Szabadság* (Hungarian Freedom). On October 30 it was these two dailies that gave the keynote for the campaign of incitement that followed. Their explicit message can be summed up in a few lines: So far everything has been a big lie and we can only have a democratic Hungary if the Soviet troops leave the country, if every element of recent years has been eliminated from public life. At the same time, both papers indulged in nationalist self-praise and this was intensified by the other papers. Banner headlines asserted "We Are Making World

History". "We are a small people, no more than drops in the vast ocean of the peoples of the world, nevertheless we are a great nation, a heroic nation to which all free peoples bow with respect." In the early days of November this self-glorification reached its climax, the papers reprinting the fulsome praise of Hungary that filled the Western capitalist media. On November 1 *Magyar Függetlenség* (Hungarian Independence) was only too enthusiastic: "We are extolled over the air by the radios of all the free nations." On November 1 *Igazság* reported that at the British Legation its correspondents had been told by a British diplomat that never in his life had he heard of such a magnificent revolution. The diplomat cautioned them of the need to ensure that Hungary would not be robbed of the fruits of such wonderful heroism.

Now Imre Nagy's friends openly declared the foreign policy plans that he had worked out earlier. On October 30 *Magyar Szabadság* wrote: "Hungary is a small country—she needs every friend... she is in need of every support". On the same day the newly launched *Igazság* also turned to the West: "We appeal to you, large and small nations. On our part we are prepared to do everything, help us!" Addressing a crowd that had gathered in front of the Parliament building on October 31, Imre Nagy said Hungary wanted "abrogation of the obligation imposed on us by the Warsaw Treaty". Next day, in an editorial comment on this address under the headline: "Independent Hungary Should be Neutral!", *Magyar Szabadság* foresaw a role for Hungary as "a bridge between East and West". The recurring idea of the editorial was the following: "A small people needs many friends."

Without the authorization of any constitutional body or previous consultations, on November 1 Imre Nagy in a radio address to the nation declared the neutrality of Hungary. He concluded his address with: "Long live the free, independent, democratic and neutral Hungary!" Socialism had been dropped from his political vocabulary. Now that the country, under his leadership, stood before the door of

the West, it sought admission with anti-Soviet "neutrality" in hand. Mention of socialism was inadmissible.

Let us now examine what neutrality meant in reality in the given world situation of 1956. It would have meant, first of all, under the cloak of "neutral economic prosperity", a gradual drawing into the capitalist world system. In this field naturally only the initial steps were taken. But on the propaganda front, the hostile media painted a contrast between a bleak economic present and a vision of a bright future: "Neutral Hungary could become one of Europe's richest states." Another "independent political daily", *Magyar Világ* (Hungarian World), was ready with the prescription for economic success: "Hungary must shatter the Iron Curtain", and then "closer economic ties with the West will bring great benefits". Meeting in Vienna, the Bureau of the Socialist International adopted a resolution which singled out the international organization which could help achieve this economic programme. On November 3, *Népszava* (People's Voice), the paper of the Social Democratic Party, quoted the resolution enthusiastically: "The economic reconstruction of Hungary must be made possible at the earliest possible date. It would be expedient if the Organization for European Economic Cooperation, the body established to promote economic cooperation between European countries and which has been operating successfully for several years, took measures without delay to promote Hungary's economic revival." To make this sort of thing plausible the press added reports that President Eisenhower of the United States had offered Hungary 20 million dollars in aid, that the Federal Republic of Germany would donate one million DM, and that the fund raising appeals in the West would bring great assistance to Hungary. Other headlines, the "world's heart goes out to us" or "Hungarian women have no reason to fear the winter", conveyed the same message. Undoubtedly, this welfare demagoguery was effective among large sections of the masses.

In the given international situation a "neutral Hungary" would have confronted the neighbouring socialist countries with the fact of an aggressive hotbed of war constituting a

potential threat to their peaceful labour. Opinion among the pro-Imre Nagy emigrés' was and is divided over the neutrality issue. One opinion was formulated by Méray: "...it was impossible to deny that fascism had roots in Hungary." Méray recalled that Hungary was the cradle of fascism and concluded that currents of extreme nationalism would most certainly have come into play.⁹² It is of course, common knowledge that Hungarian nationalism was always directed against the neighbouring peoples and that from 1917 it had assumed virulent anti-Soviet features as well.

The other group came out very strongly against Méray's opinion. It denied unblushingly the existence of reactionary nationalist characteristics and tendencies in Hungary. This group thought the events had been expressions of internationalism "which found expression in two sentiments and demands, both of which had a strong impact. One was the awareness of being part of Europe, the other was the call for a Central and East European Confederation."⁹³ It would be worth-while pausing for a moment to consider this argument.

A glance at the movement of opinion and the attitudes displayed by the different forces during the counter-revolution shows that little if any emphasis was given to the idea of confederation. At best, this was simply a dream of certain people, at worst a cloak for some more immediate goals. The idea of confederation was mentioned only once, in the November 1 issue of *Magyar Szabadság*, and even then only one sentence was devoted to it. In retrospect, of course, much has been said and a great deal written about confederation by the research staff of the Imre Nagy Institute in Brussels. However, the principal objective of their work has been to deny that extreme nationalist tendencies were waiting to come into the open. Nevertheless, the truth is that the counter-revolution instituted a campaign of agitation hostile to neighbouring countries engaged in building

⁹²T. Méray: *Thirteen Days That Shook the Kremlin*. Praeger 1959, pp. 176-180.

⁹³*Szemle*, Brussels 1960, Issue No. 1.

socialism. The "free" radio stations played a leading role in this campaign. As from October 31, newscasts deliberately referred to "unrest" in Romania and Czechoslovakia. There had been "incidents in Bucharest", and "something is brewing in the German Democratic Republic". They reacted sensitively to the fact that in both the afore-mentioned countries the horrors and danger involved in the counter-revolution had been reported. The Hungarian press accused the Romanian radio of "broadcasting slander" and the Berlin Radio of "telling lies". It is not difficult to imagine the impact made by reports of this kind at a time when the papers were otherwise full of long articles about world-wide admiration of Hungary.

The very real danger of extreme nationalist trends was evident in two appeals. Leaflets were distributed by the University Revolutionary Student Committee in early November, entitled "Appeal to the Young People of Czechoslovakia". The tone adopted was wildly provocative: "The Czechoslovak Communist Press is telling lies. The Prague-based agents of Moscow are also lying. So is the Czechoslovak Radio. Do not believe the horror stories about the 'Hungarian counter-revolution'," are typical sentences. Young people in Czechoslovakia were asked to reject their own country's analysis and accept instead that of Selwyn Lloyd, the British Foreign Secretary, or Pope Pius XII who spoke in favour of "Hungary's cause". The essence of the appeal lay in one sentence: "Come out in support of us and we shall support you in your future struggle for a free Czechoslovakia." The term "free Czechoslovakia" in the appeal could only mean a Czechoslovakia that was no longer socialist, and this represented both provocation and anti-Soviet incitement.

Radio Free Miskolc broadcast on October 30: "Slovaks, Romanians and Serbians!... As we can see you, too, suffer under the same yoke we are about to shake off!" Reactionary aggressive propaganda, unleashed when it thought its day had dawned, would have been raised to the status of official policy of the new system had the counter-revolution been able to clinch its victory.

On this subject the opinion of the "moderate" Smallholders' Party will repay examination. On November 1, 1956, in the first issue of *Kis Újság* (Small Paper) the party's foreign policy concept, the importance of a "neutral Hungary", was formulated under the pretext of a review of the foreign press. The title summed up the essence: "The Hungarian Struggle Has Created the Possibility for a General European Settlement." Let us examine the type of general settlement the chronicler had in mind. The new possibility had been opened up by "the shift in the power relations brought about by the events in Hungary". In other words, the forces of socialism should be curbed, and the capitalist world system should be expanded as the basis of a new European order. To avoid any possible doubts the author made it clear: a new settlement can be accomplished "after the Soviet Union has withdrawn from Eastern Europe". In the dictionary of the West the entry: "withdrawal of the Soviets" had for long meant "liberation" which, in turn, was identical with the restoration of the capitalist system. But something had to be given in exchange for the "loosening up of the East-European bloc or its future disintegration". The exchange was spelt out: "Since it is extremely important that the countries in this new system should not be required to grapple with economic difficulties," the West must give more intensive economic assistance to the East and Central European countries in the future.

Though there were differences as regards the proposed method of achieving their ends, both the extreme and the "moderate" counter-revolution posed a threat to the security and the peaceful life of the neighbouring countries.

The essential foreign policy feature of a "neutral Hungary" was an anti-Soviet stance and a readiness to wage war against the Soviet Union.

Although nationalist instigation against the neighbouring peoples is extremely dangerous, its role is a limited one. Anti-Soviet attitudes, however, constitute a threat not merely to a neighbouring country, the Soviet Union; it is the crudest, most aggressive form of anti-Communism, hatred of socialism and workers' power. It has a general reactionary

content, and is a permanent ideological weapon of international imperialism. Anti-Sovietism is invariably a weapon directed against social progress; an enemy of the general progress of humankind. Inevitably, it was the main ideological weapon of counter-revolution. This is always the case wherever and whenever the external and internal enemy act against the forces of socialism.

While the Cabinet led by Imre Nagy was busy declaring neutrality and getting it accepted, the military leaders of the counter-revolution were hard at work preparing for the struggle against Soviet troops. In the natural course of events this activity was accompanied by an intensive propaganda campaign. On October 31 thousands of leaflets were distributed announcing that the "revolutionaries" of the National Air Defence Command were prepared to do battle with the Soviet troops. On November 1 Dudás's *Magyar Függetlenség* quoted an editorial from the *Daily Telegraph* saying that the Soviet Union was Hungary's only enemy and that no political consideration should tie her to the Soviet Union. Obviously, the quotation was intended to express the agreement of Dudás and his group with this idea.

In the days that followed the counter-revolutionary papers worked up an atmosphere of hysteria around reports of Soviet troop movements and "danger threatening the achievements of the revolution". It is therefore quite obvious what newly appointed major general Pál Maléter had in mind when he told Western journalists at his "headquarters": "However, our army has weapons and if necessary it can defend itself against the intruders."

General Béla Király was in charge of preparing forces to fight the Soviet troops. On October 30 he told the meeting establishing the Special Forces Committee that Budapest must be made combat ready. To this end Király's staff was formed and, with the assistance of the "Revolutionary Council of the National Air Defence Command", monitored the locations and movements of Soviet troops to prepare a working battle map. General Király ordered the map of the artillery defence system of Budapest to be made available to

his combat staff, which then began plans for defence against armoured vehicles. Representatives were sent from Budapest to the different army units to begin preparations for struggle against Soviet troops in cooperation with the local "revolutionary councils". For example, three persons in civilian dress arrived at the staff of the 3rd Division in Kecs-kemét on November 1 with the above mission. Their first step was to arrest the officers they considered to be unreliable for their purpose.

It was also Király's staff that organized the arming of the "National Guards" with heavy weapons obtained from military arsenals. They had greater confidence in the anti-Soviet attitude of the National Guards than in the possibility of using army units for action in the event of a provocation against the Soviet troops. This confidence was a reciprocal one. Even the infamous United Nations report admitted that the insurgents had no confidence in the officers and, for this reason, the leadership was left in civilian hands. Whatever instructions they were given, they only accepted them in case "they were confirmed by a leading personality in whom they had confidence, such as Generals Maléter or Király".

To build up and strengthen the reactionary core of the armed forces, a decision was taken to form a corps of ex-officers and senior officers of the Horthy regime. Within a few days more than five hundred persons of this kind submitted requests for their reactivation, more than three hundred in writing. The applicants included many war criminals, conspirators and persons who had committed crimes against the state. General Béla Király set up a three-member so-called rehabilitation committee on November 1 to deal with the applications. It was composed of himself and another two ex-Horthy officers. These elements flooded the Ministry of Defence and swarmed around the Ministers in the Parliament building. Many offered their services to the Air Defence Command especially after it had issued its memorable appeal. These stubborn reactionary, anti-people militarists constituted the firm basis, which was concealed from the masses, of military dictatorship and anti-Soviet war.

In that period external imperialist intervention broadened, taking advantage of the most deceptive forms for its purposes. At the United States Legation in Budapest two illegal radio transmitters and receivers kept the "resistance centre in the free world" informed about the internal situation and foreseeable events, and received instructions and advice on the tactics to be adopted. It was reported in the American press that the doyen of the cold war "Wild Bill", General William J. Donovan, who headed American intelligence during World War II, established headquarters in Austria during the October events as head of the "National Rescue Committee". According to *The Washington Daily News*, Donovan visited Hungary several times from his headquarters during that period. In addition, quite a few other "experts" also visited Hungary as representatives of some organization or as journalists.

Well-informed foreign missions in Budapest were in touch with the military leaders of the counter-revolution. Mr. Quade, an official of the American Legation, visited the Kilián Barracks on October 30 and after introducing himself officially inquired about the political situation. Members of the more influential foreign missions went to see Pál Maléter. On November 1, James N. Cowley, "a thin and tall colonel who was the military attaché of the United Kingdom", showed up at the "headquarters" of General Maléter. Reporting the visit, the November 2 issue of the army paper *Magyar Honvéd* (Hungarian Soldier) described the colonel as giving opinions about the events, offering advice as to how to "hold on to the results achieved" and on uniting the armed groups. Undoubtedly, his advice which must have been associated with military and military policy matters, served first and foremost the purposes of the preparation for a struggle against Soviet troops and underlined the need for a military dictatorship. "In exchange" Pál Maléter informed Colonel Cowley about the movements of the Soviet troops and their expected intentions. Cooperation between the two officers was complete, a point Maléter reported with some pride at one of the meetings of the Council of Ministers.

We do not have even approximate figures for the numbers sent from the West to take part in the action in Hungary. But most certainly they were quite numerous especially in Transdanubia, the region in the proximity of the Western border, which offered ease of access and escape. The reality and extent of the danger of imperialist interference were actually indicated by the special schemes associated with the Transdanubian National Council.

The question arises whether or not the Transdanubian National Council was a separate government? The reply is not dependent on whether the body in question had ministers or what it considered itself to be, but on the role it played in practice and the kind of ideas this body, which had its seat in the city of Győr, began to translate into practice. Potentially and in its development it was the northern pole of counter-revolution. In its first statement, the "National Convention", the body which created the Transdanubian National Council, posed for the government in Budapest demands that were guaranteed to attract the support of every counter-revolutionary force. At its October 30 session the Transdanubian National Council called upon the "revolutionary" organs of the Transdanubian counties to join the organization and announced "Borsod and Bács-Kiskun counties as well as Csepel, a district of Budapest, have already joined the Council". A resolution was passed even on the form of numerical representation: "The counties that join shall be represented on the Transdanubian National Council by four delegates."

The leaders of the Radio Free Europe Commission were quick to recognize the potential of the new organization. Even the pro-Imre Nagy emigrés did not attempt to deny the facts and were forced to admit that there had been an imperialist plan designed to divide the country into two parts. "Transdanubia is the part of Hungary which borders Austria and which is separated from the rest of the country by the Danube River as a natural frontier. It was the policy of Western forces, which are still to be identified, to form an independent government in this part of Hungary, to separate it from the rest of the country, making the city of Győr

its capital, thus creating a Hungary divided into two parts like Germany." This is how the scheme was described in the January 1960 issue of the Brussels-based *Szemle* (Review). However, the author was wrong in saying that the engineers of the scheme were as yet to be identified, for the chief schemer was the staff of Radio Free Europe in Munich.

In an effort to translate the idea into practice, Aurél Ábrányi, leader of the Vienna espionage bureau of the Radio Free Europe Commission, and Kálmán Konkoly, an official of Radio Free Europe in Munich, went to Győr. They were assigned the task of winning the support of the leaders of the Transdanubian National Council for the scheme and persuade them to appeal to the United Nations for support in a letter. NATO also undertook a role in the implementation of the substantial plan. A campaign of agitation began with the aim of persuading political figures of NATO member-states to support this plan. In the corridors of the Belgian Parliament building, for example, van Zeeland, the former Belgian Foreign Minister, proposed that Hungary be partitioned.⁹⁴ "At the United Nations, delegates of Western powers, in the event of some country submitting a proposal to any international forum, undertook to secure a vote in favour of dispatching an international police force to that part of the country which had been made independent of the then Hungarian government and was free from Soviet troops." It was the Ambassador of Italy to Vienna who undertook the task.⁹⁵

However, Radio Free Europe sent not only liaison officers, it also gave technical assistance. A 10 kW capacity transmitter was sent to Győr from Munich. A Radio Free Europe truck with eight or ten transmitters and receivers on board was cruised throughout Transdanubia, and engaged in counter-revolutionary propaganda. General Zákó, the leader of the Fraternal Association of Hungarian Fighters

⁹⁴F. Erőss: *Magyar Munkásvezérek Nyugaton*. (Hungarian Workers' Leaders in the West). Pannónia, Budapest 1961, p. 78.

⁹⁵M. Szabó: *Foglalkozásuk: emigráns* (They Are Emigrés by Profession). Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1958, p. 79.

and his entourage arrived in the city of Győr to assess the military situation and potential. The former Arrow Cross people, Hungary's nazi party, boasted in the November issue of their magazine *Út és Cél* (The Road and the Aim) that "the leader of the Hungarist (Arrow Cross) movement crossed the Hungarian border (from Austria) in the company of a member of our editorial board to obtain information about the situation on the spot". Trips of this kind designed to obtain information obviously served the preparations for armed intervention of major dimensions.

The activities carried on by the Transdanubian National Council served the implementation of these extremely dangerous plans. Their propaganda contained constant references to Transdanubia as a uniform territory and, for that matter, one that had to be brought under a unified leadership. In some places, especially in the broadcasts of the "free" local radio stations the term "Free Transdanubian Republic" was also mentioned.

But the real danger was involved in No. 7 of the resolutions passed by the meeting electing the Transdanubian National Council. It read: "The Transdanubian National Council deems it desirable to organize a unified military leadership in Transdanubia." A number of officers embarked upon establishing the "Transdanubian United Armed Forces". On November 1 they broadcast an announcement that the military units of Győr, Pápa, Zalaegerszeg and Sárbogárd had joined them. Talks were also in progress with the "revolutionary military councils" of other units about joining the United Armed Forces and giving support to specific "Transdanubian Independence".

Some representatives of the Transdanubian National Council travelled to the border between Hungary and Austria, others went on to Vienna to make direct contact with the capitalist forces prepared to lend assistance. Zoltán Berján, for instance, went to Vienna and called for "assistance for the Hungarian people". On November 1, a four-member delegation went to Vienna to contact and seek assistance from a varied assortment of international organizations and emigré leaders. One of the delegates, a member of the

Council who escaped to the West, records that they were received by Helmer, the Austrian Minister of the Interior, as well.⁹⁶

On November 7, they had talks with the infamous "Colonel Bell" of Radio Free Europe in Munich. Considering the fact that they had only a few days at their disposal, they indeed did operate at "revolutionary" speed in laying the groundwork for this particularly cynical imperialist scheme which constituted a threat not only to the existence of the Hungarian people but also to the peace of the world at large. At the same time, they did not hesitate to seal the border with Czechoslovakia to prevent any possibility of assistance reaching the Hungarian socialist forces. The Czechoslovak Communists, party activists, railwaymen and working peasants sought contact with their Hungarian acquaintances, friends and long standing comrades to give assistance to their class brothers in their difficult situation. They sent a large quantity of leaflets and newspapers in Hungarian language across the border calling upon the Hungarian workers to defend the dictatorship of the proletariat and not to forget the lessons of the aftermath of the 1919 Republic of Councils. For that reason the Transdanubian National Council ordered the complete sealing of the border between Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

The "agitation associated with the United Nations" was designed to distract the attention of Hungarian public opinion from the dangerous character of the Transdanubian plans which might well have triggered of a third world war. Illusions about the United Nations were widespread. Because people were afraid that the events in Hungary might lead to the outbreak of a third world war, the counter-revolutionaries felt obliged to camouflage the preparation for armed struggle against the Soviet troops. To this end they resorted to a confidence trick, talking of propaganda "placing Hungary under the trusteeship of the United Nations". Radio Free Europe transmitted reports from New York

⁹⁶*Tanulmányok a magyar forradalomról* (Studies about the Hungarian Revolution). Aurora Books, Munich 1966, pp. 288-289.

which gave rise to the belief that Western intervention was imminent. Radio Free Europe assured the Hungarian "freedom fighters" of the solidarity of the "whole world" and encouraged them to carry on with the armed struggle. The counter-revolutionary press borrowed the news from Radio Free Europe and presented its reports of their plans, ideas or hopes as though they were realities. Let us see how the hopes concerning "United Nations intervention" were raised to a higher pitch day after day.

On November 1 *Kis Újság*, the daily of the Smallholders' Party wrote: "...many foreign journalists come to this country mainly for the purpose of preparing the forthcoming visit of the United Nations Secretary General to Hungary."

On November 2 *Magyar Függetlenség*, the paper of Dudás and his group wrote that a "United Nations Committee is to arrive in Budapest at noon tomorrow". The paper of the "revolutionary servicemen" *Magyar Honvéd* was even more optimistic since it wrote: "...a United Nations delegation is to arrive in Budapest this afternoon."

The November 3 issue of the "paper of the Young Workers' Revolutionary Council" reported its hopes as a fact: "A committee of United Nations observers arrived in Hungary during the past 48 hours via the Czechoslovak city of Pozsony. The representatives of the world organization set about the task of accomplishing their noble, danger-fraught mission without delay. They are employing every possible means to follow events, including aerial observation, naturally with an eye to any developments relating to a danger of foreign military intervention. Their superior organs are kept constantly informed about their observations, and these are transmitted at frequent intervals by the United Nations Radio." No doubt the news was formulated in a highly discreet manner.

The accolade for "reporting" news of "United Nations Intervention" must go to *Valóság* (Reality). On November 3, this "independent Hungarian daily" carried an "unofficial report unique to the whole Hungarian press". It wrote:

"A young Budapest revolutionary reached the Austro-Hungarian border by car at approximately midnight on November 1. He succeeded in talking to United Nations troops which are now stationed along the border.

Several UN servicemen, including British and American troops, told him they were on a state of alert. But they did not intend to set foot on Hungarian soil as long as they did not receive a definite call from Imre Nagy to enter Hungary.

As is known, the Prime Minister had already stated and broadcast on the Hungarian Radio that if the Soviet troops refused to leave the country despite a repeated call for their withdrawal and after the abrogation of Hungary's membership of the Warsaw Treaty which has already been made, we shall take advantage of the United Nations' assistance for their removal."

Constant repetition by the Hungarian press and radio of Imre Nagy's cable to the United Nations and of his anti-Soviet measures gave credibility to reports of UN intervention. Even Radio Free Europe's Commission was satisfied. The daily instructions on November 2 called upon Radio Free Europe in Munich in firm terms to support the new government and end attacks on Imre Nagy.

Radio Free Europe began to realize that the basis of the "new system" and its anti-Soviet line should be strengthened. It broadcast on November 2: "There has never been as much need for national unity, of the kind called for by the Prime Minister, as today." On the same day even the Transdanubian National Council decided that the Nagy Cabinet fulfilled the demands of the "revolution" and assured it of full support.

The university revolutionary committees which were engaged mainly in propaganda activities came out in very strong support of the idea of "national unity" around Imre Nagy. The so-called Buda University Revolutionary Subcommittee declared in its "Order of the Day No. 1": "It is our most sacred duty towards our people and the national revolution to bring about the broadest possible popular and national unity, because this is the only way in which all the

forces can be united to safeguard the interests of our national, popular revolution."⁹⁷

The University Revolutionary Students' Committee also issued leaflets and published articles carried by its paper *Egyetemi Ifjúság* (University Youth) demanding the temporary suspension of party struggles in the interest of bringing about national unity. This was described as the only way to defend "the achievements of the democratic revolution and freedom struggle".⁹⁸

The "national unity" advocated by the counter-revolutionaries had nothing to do whatsoever with the actual interests of the Hungarian people. The Communists who were being persecuted and the many honest people arrested were not to participate in this "unity". Also excluded were the workers defending the publicly owned factories, the peasants who had gained land when it was distributed under the Land Reform, the honest citizens supporting social progress and hating the old regime of overlords. No matter how many times they repeated the epithets "popular" or "national", the advocates of this spurious unity could not conceal the narrowness of its social base. It was on this field of nationalist, anti-Soviet "national unity" that Imre Nagy and the knights of "liberation" met and embraced.

While the Communist and progressive forces were subjected to White Terror and reaction, which had gained ground, prepared for anti-Soviet struggle, Imre Nagy fostered "national unity"; he opened wide the gates to the right-wing forces, while dissociating himself from the forces of socialism. He clung to this concept of unity in his study written after November 4: "This national unity (in the struggle for independence) embraced all the classes and strata of society as well as every political trend."⁹⁹ In fact this unity existed only to the extent that all the right-wing elements and groups joined forces to eliminate socialism.

⁹⁷*Magyar Jövő* (Hungarian Future), November 3, 1956.

⁹⁸See *Egyetemi Ifjúság* (University Youth), November 3-4, 1956.

⁹⁹I. Nagy: *Gondolatok — emlékezések* (Thoughts and Memories), Snagov 1956-1957.

As was pointed out, this concept of a "neutral Hungary" not only attacked Hungarian progress, and the independent, creative work of the Hungarian people, but constituted a threat to the security of neighbouring peoples and to the peace of all Europe as well. The anti-Soviet actions of the counter-revolutionaries involved the danger of a Third World War. The correctness of this evaluation of the situation becomes especially evident if we take into account the open imperialist aggression against the independence, freedom and sovereignty of Egypt, a country that had gained its independence not long before 1956. Imperialism launched a general offensive.

In a radio broadcast on the evening of November 3, Cardinal Mindszenty, intoxicated by victory, buried what he described as the "fallen regime". After a prelude in which he praised the "people" and the "armed struggle" and referred with contempt to the "Russian Empire", he passed on rapidly to a presentation of his own programme since "the old regime has already been swept away". He threatened "the members and the successors of the fallen regime"; he declared that "they bear separate responsibility for their activities" and that they "have to be called to account in all spheres of life". In expressing the social aims of the programme, he said: "We want to be a country and nation of an exclusively cultural-national spirit based upon private property which is restricted by social representation". The restoration of private ownership was to be followed by elections "under international supervision". Although he made no overt demand for the restoration of the land owned by the church and distributed in 1945, there could be no doubting his meaning when he said there was good reason to expect "the restoration of the institutions and associations of the Catholic Church".

Counter-revolution, enjoying the support of international reaction read the last rites over the body of socialist Hungary. While they did so, Hungarian patriots were preparing to launch a counter blow that would lead to the suppression of counter-revolution.

The Armed Suppression of the Counter-Revolution with the Assistance of Soviet Troops

In the early days of November 1956 socialism ran into a deep crisis in Hungary. The forces of counter-revolutionary restoration no longer bothered to conceal their real interests; they openly sought complete power. Representatives of the counter-revolutionary armed groups organized unified counter-revolutionary armed forces, and under the leadership of the special staff led by General Béla Király, prepared to fight the Soviet troops. In actual fact a new hotbed of war had developed on the territory of Hungary. It constituted a threat not only to the future of the Hungarian people but also to the peace and security of Europe and the whole world.

Throughout the world, especially in Europe, the forces of progress and socialism were benumbed and bemused. The convictions of a number of people in the ranks of the Communist and workers' parties were shaken, defeatism spread rapidly. The slogans of the counter-revolutionaries and revisionists immobilized many among the professional classes. Beguiled by slogans about "purification of socialism", "independent and self-contained socialism", "the national democratic forms of socialism", they took a position against the Soviet Union and lost their hold on the basic principles of proletarian internationalism. Although the idea of the "purification of socialism" was received with delight and enjoyed the support of international reaction, party activists and the workers in general recognized more clearly what was really involved in the events.

Reaction, the organs of cold war and its representatives

launched an offensive. World reaction was jubilant and celebrated its victory. They glorified the "heroic Hungarian freedom fighters", intensified anti-Communist and anti-Soviet propaganda and were all set to bury socialism. Throughout the world, terrorist forces emboldened by these events attacked the headquarters of Communist parties, staged demonstrations with reactionary slogans, and hailed the "Hungarian revolution" and Imre Nagy.

Two units of international imperialism, the British and French governments representing the interests of big capitalists, taking advantage of Israeli aggression, launched an armed attack on Egypt on October 29 in an effort to regain the Suez Canal. This was an overt, armed predatory attack by the forces of colonialism directed against Egypt, a country striving for national independence. At the same time, it constituted a threat to the general cause of the national independence movements. A new hotbed of war had been created on the northern shores of the African Continent close to Europe. The wind of imminent war swept across the world.

On the last two days of October and on November 1, supported by the revisionist traitors the Hungarian counter-revolutionaries who now felt they had achieved victory, took measures that left no doubt about their real nature. On October 30 they began to murder Communists at the Budapest party headquarters. On the same day, Prime Minister Imre Nagy announced the formation of a new coalition government based on a "multi-party system". He acceded to the demands of counter-revolutionary groups and on October 31 announced Hungary's intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Treaty. On November 1 he proclaimed neutrality.

On November 4, 1956, the struggle against counter-revolution entered a new stage. With direct assistance from the Soviet Union, the Hungarian socialist forces embarked on action to suppress the counter-revolutionary revolt and to eliminate its consequences.

At this point, the question arises: what were the circumstances and conditions which made it possible to contain and throw back imperialism's two attacks in a compar-

actively short time despite the difficulties of the situation? To answer the above question, we must examine the factors which made possible the suppression of the armed counter-revolutionary gangs without a prolonged armed struggle. We must also study why no armed conflict ensued in spite of the fact that international imperialism was interested in the outcome of Hungarian events and actively interfered in them. Undoubtedly, the successful avoidance of these two dangers was made possible by the adaptation of tactics that corresponded to the specific internal and external conditions.

6.1. The Internal Circumstances of the Suppression of the Counter-Revolution

The armed forces of the counter-revolution in Hungary were crushed by relying on external assistance, that is, with the use of Soviet troops which offered favourable opportunities and created good conditions for the domestic forces of socialism to carry out their political and ideological struggle successfully.

On November 2 and 3, the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government, the revolutionary centre of the Hungarian socialist forces was formed; the Executive Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and the party's provisional Central Committee were re-established. These developments played a decisive role in the suppression of counter-revolution.

The government headed by Imre Nagy refused to work for the goals for which it had been appointed by the Presidential Council. It betrayed the socialist ideas it had been sworn in to serve. Instead of defending socialism, Imre Nagy's government helped those who sought to liquidate it. Instead of restoring law and order and public security it tolerated the chaos and terrorism of the armed gangs; moreover, it disbanded the armed organizations on which it could have relied for support in restoring law and order. Acting without any form of authorization, Imre Nagy abrogated

important international agreements. Nagy treated the true friends of the Hungarian people in a hostile fashion.

In speeches and articles Imre Nagy's supporters argued that these steps were taken in response to popular demand. Demand along these lines undoubtedly existed, but it reflected the interests of a minority current brought to the surface by the counter-revolutionary stream. The representatives of reaction exploited every available means of propaganda to present their own desires as if they were those of the "people". The real interests of the Hungarian working people were associated with socialism; they demanded the righting of wrongs, the elimination of errors, the observance of legality, and the building of socialism in a way corresponding to Hungary's particular conditions. Under the conditions created by Imre Nagy's actions these demands could not be realized. But at that time this was not clear to the masses; counter-revolutionary propaganda and the poisoning of the soul by treason had brought about mental confusion and blinded their eyes.

It was amid these extraordinarily difficult circumstances that János Kádár rallied a group of Hungarian patriots and formed the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government. The reason for this action was explained in an open letter: "We were compelled to take this responsible act by the realization that within the Imre Nagy Government, which had become impotent under the pressure of reaction, we no longer had any opportunity to take action against the increasingly strong counter-revolutionary danger threatening to annihilate our People's Republic, workers' and peasants' power and our socialist achievements."

The formation of the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government and the reorganization of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party were in fact revolutionary actions. The nature of the government was basically defined by the fact that it was a revolutionary, Communist administration which made an open break with treason, came out firmly in opposition to the counter-revolutionary flood. This meant that the most important precondition, the establishment of

a centre of revolutionary forces, had been created for suppressing counter-revolution and restoring socialist order.

The new government began its activities in defence of and in the spirit of the constitution of the People's Republic of Hungary. The new administration was formed on the initiative of ministers who remained faithful to their oath of allegiance, broke with Imre Nagy, who had adopted a fundamentally treasonable position and acted to defend people's power. This government enjoyed the support of both the President of the Presidential Council of the People's Republic and the Speaker of Parliament. The new revolutionary centre gathered strength for a very difficult struggle successfully, and breaking with the flood of counter-revolution, decided to assume responsibility for the real interests of the people that rested on lasting foundations.

The goals of the revolutionary centre can be summarized as follows: to crush the counter-revolution, to restore law and order in the country, to reorganize the forces of socialist revolution and to ensure continuation of the building of socialism. In their first documents government and party outlined a programme which expressed the interests of the broadest possible strata of the Hungarian working people, irrespective of momentary condition or mood.

However, these correct goals would certainly have remained mere wishes had the counter-revolutionary armed groups not been crushed. The Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government and the Executive Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP) had to decide whether to risk a civil war in the course of suppressing the counter-revolution or to find another path towards a solution. A civil war would have meant prolonged struggle claiming too many lives. Thousands of Communists, socialist patriots all over the country were awaiting call to struggle, and beyond doubt there was a readiness to fight in the working class districts of Budapest, like Angyalföld and Csepel.

Communist workers were the first to begin to organize themselves in order to halt the headway being made by counter-revolution. Here are a few examples: an under-

ground Communist organization led by a five-member committee was set up in the Red Star Tractor Factory of the Kispest district of Budapest. In the Tenth District armed workers organized to combat the counter-revolution, using the premises of the local brewery as a cover for their activities. Party leaders in the Thirteenth District continued active organization for struggle in several factories even after the assault and ransacking of the Budapest Party Headquarters. In the Eighth District, Communist workers and party activists in the MÁVAG and Ganz Waggon Factory organized their ranks; weapons and documents were provided by Major Ernő Jánosi, commander of the district recruiting centre. At Királyerdő, 13 Csepel Communists formed an armed group and set about mobilizing for struggle workers loyal to workers' power. Groups of Communists in the Third District organized also to find a way out of the grave situation. Miners in Nógrád County did not cease to struggle against the counter-revolution for a single day. A meeting of some 30 to 40 active Communists in the village of Karancslapujtő issued an appeal for struggle on November 1; the next day over 500 people answered their call and attended a rally where they committed themselves to the cause of socialism. Miners in Baglyasalja, Salgó, Karancslapujtő, Nagybátony and other villages armed themselves; an 83 strong combat unit of the workers' militia, they had established, recaptured Salgótarján, seat of Nógrád County, from the counter-revolutionaries on November 4. Miners in the south, in Baranya County, in the mining cities of Pécs and Komló organized in much the same manner. In the town of Kaposvár the Communists of the sugar factory defended their plant with arms. During the night of November 1 they held a meeting at which the following important decision was adopted: "...the counter-revolution is not a special Hungarian affair; it is a provocation of international imperialism the development of which cannot be indifferent to the members of the socialist community of nations. We must endure to the end!"

The former agricultural proletarians of Békés County also refused to watch developments from afar with folded

arms. In the town of Szarvas 35 people took up arms on November 2 to restore workers' power. They were joined by another 50 two days later. In the early hours November 4, the party organization formulated a resolution: "The counter-revolution which has launched an attack on our country, people, town, party and socialist people's power must be suppressed without delay. The National Guard which has been placed at the service of counter-revolution must be disarmed. The public buildings and streets of Szarvas must be repossessed. People's power must be restored."¹⁰⁰ By the evening of November 5, the armed force of the counter-revolution had been crushed throughout the Szarvas area and in the four days following November 4, some 550 people joined the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. At Tótkomlós, 220 people rallied under the banner of the party of Communists in a few days. Many groups consisting of 10 to 20 persons armed with hunting guns and farm implements came together in cooperative farms throughout Hungary to defend common property and the new life. A Communist party organization was formed in Kunszentmárton in the Máté Zalka Farmers' Cooperative on November 1 by 60 persons. A similar attitude was displayed by the conscious members of the Budakalász Farmers' Cooperative in Kisújszállás, the Lenin Cooperative in Karcag, the Rákóczi Cooperative in Mezőtúr, the Red Star Cooperative Farm at Barcs, and so on. The 20 armed members of the *Szikra* (Spark) Farmers' Cooperative in the village of Rakamaz (Szabolcs County) were called the "Rakamaz Resistance Fighters". In the village of Szabadi (Somogy County), a militant party organization prevented the counter-revolution from gaining the upper hand. The cases listed above are but random examples of the groups of people who while still scattered, were gaining strength as they prepared to launch counter-attack.

Those loyal to workers' and peasants' power in different units of the army, the Border Guards and the former special forces were also organizing in an effort to find a way out of

¹⁰⁰D. Varga: *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69 and p. 95.

the difficult situation. Considerable forces, though scattered, stood ready to defend the socialist revolution in Hungary. To organize these forces properly and to throw them into battle would not only have taken time, but would have led to even greater damage and bloodshed. It was on the basis of these considerations that the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government decided to use fraternal internationalist assistance to ensure victory in the armed struggle and to reorganize the revolutionary forces and gain the working people's confidence in the course of consistent political and ideological struggle following the restoration of law and order. That is why the statement of the patriots declared: "Acting in the interest of our people, working class and country, the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government has addressed itself to the Soviet command requesting help for our people to destroy the sinister forces of reaction and to restore calm and order in our country."

The government of the Soviet Union responded to the Hungarian request. Its troops crushed the armed counter-revolutionary centres. Fighting had by and large been brought to an end by November 8; in some places, by November 10. Small groups and snipers continued to cause problems for the population for more than a month, but they did not constitute a force waging consistent struggle. They were eventually suppressed by the Hungarian special forces.

Imperialist propaganda trumpeted far and wide reports that fighting after November 4 was heavier and claimed more lives than in the preceding period. The truth was just the opposite: "...Two-thirds of the injured were wounded before November 3 and one-third after November 4."¹⁰¹ Hospital records of the treatment of wounded show a similar division. On October 24, 298 wounded persons were admitted to ten Budapest hospitals (Szövetség utca, Schöpf-

¹⁰¹Fontosabb adatok az 1956. október-decemberi időszakról (Important Data about the Period between October and December 1956). Central Statistical Office, Budapest 1957, p. 47.

Mérei, István, Bakács tér, János, Balassa, Tétényi út, Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, Szabolcs utca, Koltói Clinic); the figure for October 25 was 266. During the days that followed there was a gradual decrease in the number of wounded. On November 3 the wounded taken to the above listed ten hospitals was 30. It rose to 93 on November 4. A day later the figure went up to 116. On November 6 it dropped to 105. During the subsequent days there was a steady decrease, falling to 30 on November 10. The trend was much the same in other hospitals. For example, 28 wounded were taken to the hospital in Sándor Péterfy utca on October 23, 31 on October 24 and 15 on October 25. The number dropped to zero on November 4, but a day later 10 wounded were taken to the same hospital and 15 on November 6. No wounded were taken there during the subsequent days. At the Sport Hospital 11 were admitted on October 25, 15 a day later, 26 on October 27, 4 on November 4, 10 a day later and 16 on November 6. During the days that followed only one or two wounded were taken to the same hospital. Records at the Trefort Polyclinic, which treated more wounded than all the hospitals put together, are characteristic: 1,700 wounded were treated on October 23 and 24, 500 on October 25 and 26 and some 70 or 80 daily during the subsequent fighting.

The carefully chosen tactics adopted by the Soviet troops played a decisive role in the fact that the armed counter-revolutionary groups were suppressed so rapidly. It was also of decisive importance that the counter-revolutionary armed gangs did not succeed in gaining armed or unarmed popular support of any substance. There were few real clashes and no consistent armed struggle in the provinces where the counter-revolution adopted methods of guerilla warfare. It was also a major contribution to the rapid ending of armed struggle that no units of the Hungarian Army waged organized struggle against the Soviet troops. That was a highly important circumstance, for had the well-trained and well-armed units joined the fighting, it would have made things more difficult and delayed considerably the crushing of the counter-revolution.

Events disproved the claim by the domestic and interna-

tional leaders of the counter-revolution that they had the support of between 80 and 90 per cent of the Hungarian Army. On November 1, the experienced espionage chief, the then head of CIA, Allen Dulles, reported to a meeting in President Eisenhower's study, "Eighty per cent of the Hungarian Army has defected".¹⁰² It is of course a fact that individual officers and military councils, mainly those attached to the troops stationed in Transdanubia, did join insurrectionists. Soldiers did fight in a number of counter-revolutionary groups; it was on the basis of these individual actions that the whole Hungarian Army was judged in this way. The activities of the command under General Béla Király indicated that they had hoped their preparations within the army would enable them to mobilize in their support substantial military units. However, on November 4 and 5, when these preparations were put to test, things worked out differently. Not a single Hungarian military unit, acting on prepared planning or in fulfilment of superior orders, entered into conflict with Soviet troops. There was sporadic shooting in the areas around army barracks in the early morning hours of November 4, e. g., in Kaposvár, Békéscsaba, Záhony, Szolnok and in Budapest in the vicinity of the Petőfi and Mátyás barracks and elsewhere. In almost all cases, however, this was attributable to misunderstanding and never lasted more than an hour or two. At Dunapentele (earlier named Sztálinváros) some artillery batteries went over to the side of the counter-revolutionaries and refused to surrender even after they had been asked to do so by a party of truce negotiators composed of Soviet and Hungarian officers who arrived there on November 6. On the morning of November 7, Soviet tanks launched an attack on the batteries and resistance was brought to an end by 4.30 p. m. when the Hungarian soldiers abandoned their positions. This meant the end of armed struggle there, too.

In spite of the fact that General Béla Király's orders to the armed forces to fire on Soviet troops arrived at several provincial barracks on November 5 and 6 and even 7, the

¹⁰²D. D. Eisenhower: *op. cit.*, p. 82.

I. Hungarian forces refused to do so. The fate of the counter-revolutionary gangs was sealed when the military units refused to go over to their side and the population withheld support for their armed struggle.

The question arises: why could the Hungarian Army not be mobilized against the Soviet troops despite the frenetic activities of the officers supporting the counter-revolution? Credit must first of all be given to the courage and firmness of officers who, when the moment of decision arrived on November 4, threw off the paralysis and disorientation induced by treason or impotence on the part of their leaders, and demonstrated that their hearts and minds were in the right place. They were instrumental in preventing struggle against their comrades-in-arms. The firm stand of officers loyal to the people in the Ministry of Defence, in the commands of the different services and in the staffs of both the major and smaller formations, prevented tragedy. Perhaps some of the officers did not go further than reckoning with realities. Nevertheless the attitude they displayed was an honest one and they did not support resistance against the allies. There were hundreds and hundreds of honest officers and servicemen in those difficult days, who, though their names have not been recorded, did their duty and acted in a manner worthy of their oath.

Early morning on November 4 when the senior officers in the Ministry of Defence were informed of the formation of the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government, many contacted the military units under their command and ordered them not to fight. Colonel Ugray, for example, made contact by phone with the anti-tank artillery regiment of Tatabánya, the staff of the artillery division stationed in Cegléd and with other units and told them about the formation of the new government, the assistance given by the Soviet troops and asked them to coordinate their activities with the Soviet command. In the staff of the 3rd Division in Kecskemét Colonel Rudolf Havas, the senior officer on duty on November 4, gave orders to the units belonging to him not to shoot and to cooperate with the Soviet forces. Many

examples could be quoted of how commanders and officers attached to other units acted in the same manner.

In the town of Baja in the Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Barracks the so-called revolutionary military council and the command took the joint decision that they would not resort to arms against the Soviet troops on the side of Imre Nagy. In Kalocsa, Communist officers were engaged in organizing activities against the counter-revolution as from October 30. On November 5 they met in the garrison club to set up the local special force. It was composed of 44 people all of whom declared their readiness to fight on the side of the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government and alongside the Soviet troops to completely annihilate the counter-revolution and to restore law and order. On November 3, an officers' meeting at the unit of the motorized regiment of Aszód stationed in Budapest decided unanimously not to oppose Soviet troops if they moved into Budapest.

On November 5 several officers of the artillery regiment of Cegléd took guns and four truckloads of ammunition to Budapest for the Soviet artillery engaged in fighting. In the early hours of November 5 the commanders of the motorized battalion of Hatvan agreed with the commander of the Soviet units stationed there that Hungarian and Soviet servicemen would act jointly in restoring and maintaining law and order within the city. A Hungarian army unit undertook the job of guarding the Power Plant at Mátra and the local post office. A similar agreement was reached in the neighbouring town of Gyöngyös in the late hours of November 3 between the Hungarian and Soviet military commands. A three-member delegation of the army unit of Komló POBox 4066 was sent to the Soviet command in the city of Pécs on November 4 with a request for assistance to Komló where some 700 convicts had been released and partly armed by the counter-revolutionaries. A Soviet armoured unit supported by 70 members of the Hungarian special forces maintained law and order in Komló. The first special forces units composed of officers supporting the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government

were organized in Kiskunhalas, Dombóvár and Pécs on November 5, in Jánoshalma, Keszthely, Mezőtúr, Debrecen and elsewhere on November 6.

Thanks to the activities of the officers loyal to socialism, the Hungarian Army did not turn against people's power, but they did not have enough strength to prevent the disintegration of the army. As from November 5, thousands of servicemen deserted their barracks and returned to their homes. The highways were packed with Hungarian soldiers on their way home. As from November 9, however, in response to a call issued by Dr. Ferenc Münnich, the organization of special forces began all over Hungary. Their units gradually took over the maintenance of law and order and the armed defence of socialism by mid-December 1956 and served as a basis for the reorganization of the army.

The military leaders of the counter-revolution made great efforts to prepare and motivate their armed groups to conduct armed struggle. An attempt was made to organize them into regular troops and supply them with modern weapons under the guise of National Guards. These activities were directed by General Béla Király who had been appointed by the Nagy Government as nation-wide commander of the National Guards and commander-in-chief of the forces in Budapest. His command was responsible for the organization of different armed groups into regular armed units.

According to the available data, the armed counter-revolutionary groups in Budapest mustered between 9,000 and 10,000 people by November 4; lumpen proletariat and criminal elements accounted for at least two-thirds of this total.¹⁰³ The principal groups were positioned along the Grand Boulevard, at squares or in public buildings (hotels, hospitals, schools, and so on) of important intersections. The largest group operated in *Corvin köz*, it numbered around 3,000. Their arsenal included machine guns,

¹⁰³ J. Molnár writes in one of his studies: "By November 4, the number of persons making up the different armed groups had risen between eight and ten thousand; undoubtedly some 70 per cent of these were lumpen proletarian elements." *Századok* (Centuries). 1956, Issue No. 6.

light machine guns, some anti-tank guns and howitzers. The size of the group operating in Buda with *Széna tér* as their headquarters was also close to 3,000. In addition to heavy weapons, they had some 50 cars and trucks which they used for organizational activities and transporting supplies. Western attention focused on these two major armed groups and they received most visits by members of Western legations and journalists. The same two groups had the largest number of returned Hungarian fascists from Western Europe, and well-trained imperialist agents. Most Red Cross consignments went to them. The other groups varied in size and arms. Under the orders by Béla Király, the gangs in the Ninth district of Budapest were armed with modern weapons from the Hungarian Army munitions store at Fót on November 3. The arms consisted of submachine guns, light machine guns, machine guns, hand grenades and anti-tank weapons. On November 1 and 2 the group operating at *Baross tér* also received weapon consignments.

The Soviet troops began their mop-up operations early on November 4, simultaneously from different directions. Foreign propaganda organs, above all Radio Free Europe, gave the maximum of encouragement and pledged all possible support to the counter-revolutionary groups in order to ensure chaos and a protracted armed struggle. However, the imperialists's hopes were soon shattered in this respect as well, for the armed struggle was over in a few days.

On November 4 and 5 there was heavy fighting around the positions of the counter-revolutionary groups. Intoxicated by their brief spell of power, the armed groups offered strong resistance in the hope of drawing support from the population and of receiving the aid promised by the West. Imre Nagy announced, "Our troops are fighting. The Government is in its place", and he appealed to the United Nations and to the Western powers for help. He then left the Parliament building for the Yugoslav Embassy. Counter-revolutionary groups did everything they could to obtain assistance from their masters, their Western allies. László Nickelsburg, commander of the armed group operating at *Ba-*

ross tér, called a press conference on the afternoon of November 4 and through the Western journalists present appealed for military assistance from the imperialist governments. The various radio stations (Rákóczi, Csokonai, Róka, etc.) all made dramatic pleas to the West for arms and the sending of military units, basing their appeal on the proposition that struggle against the Soviet Union was a common cause. As the counter-revolutionary forces openly turned to the imperialists for assistance, ignoring the danger of triggering off a new world war, the national flag and the repetition of slogans about the national interest were relegated to a secondary place.

Radio Free Europe encouraged the counter-revolutionaries with the message that if they could go on fighting only for a few days, the United States government circles would be ready to run the risk of even a world war in order to come to their aid. On November 4 it sought to put this idea across to the listeners in the guise of a quote from the *Observer*: "If the Hungarians hold out for two or three days, the pressure on the United States government to send military assistance to the freedom fighters might be irresistible." The *Observer* added, however, that before the presidential elections of November 6, the United States Congress could not be expected to vote in favour of war. It also expressed the belief that if the Hungarians were able to carry on fighting until Wednesday, the danger of a new world war would be closer than at any time since 1939.

On November 4 and 5 the hopes of the well-supplied counter-revolutionary groups were kept alive by similar encouragements and speculations. Their leaders made repeated efforts to coordinate the struggle and prolong the period of resistance. Major General Béla Király and members of his command discussed the situation at the Budapest Police Headquarters at daybreak on November 4, and decided to organize resistance. Király ordered his staff to move to János Hill, Buda. Following the discussions with his officers he went first to the United States Legation and then to the new "Headquarters". From there he tried to give instructions and orders to the military units and counter-revo-

lutionary groups through 4 radio transmitters and receivers that had been taken there. On November 5 he sought to encourage his supporters by ordering the shelling of Budapest from the Csillebérc anti-aircraft artillery emplacement. However, the commander of the battery refused to carry out his orders, defying threats of immediate execution. The traitor Major-General complained in the October 1966 issue of *Új Látóhatár* (New Horizon): "The counter-revolutionary activity of the Stalinist forces within the army was so effective that it rendered uniform leadership of the army impossible." All those who had disagreed on any account he branded as Stalinists.

On November 6 and 7 the counter-revolutionary gangs began to disintegrate. Although fighting continued, it had lost much of its intensity. The resolute action of the Soviet troops had demonstrated that armed resistance was a hopeless venture. The anticipated imperialist assistance failed to materialize: "United Nations forces did not bomb Budapest". Except for the organized and hard-core counter-revolutionaries those engaged in fighting began to throw aside their weapons. Young people who had been misled and exploited began to disperse. Only a small number remained of the original large group at *Corvin köz*.

Dwindling numbers caused the armed counter-revolutionaries to adopt new tactics. Instead of positioning themselves in one or two buildings, they often changed their fighting bases. The larger groups of trained counter-revolutionaries split up into small sniping units. They would fire a few shots at the Soviet soldiers then quickly change position. They looted department stores, warehouses, shops, hotels, set fire to several of them and then gradually pulled out of Budapest, first into the suburbs and then into the hills. They organized new groups to seize cars and trucks and then headed for the West. The group positioned in the Royal Hotel looted and set fire to the building before setting out towards the West in the early hours of November 9.¹⁰⁴ On their way its members continued to rob and terrorize un-

¹⁰⁴Budapest City Court T. B. XVI. 9264/1961.

til they encountered Soviet units. Some 60 or 70 members of the gang led by József Dudás heading in the direction of Austria in cars, were scattered by Soviet soldiers at Tata on November 9.¹⁰⁵

Step by step Major-General Béla Király was forced to withdraw from the vicinity of Budapest. On November 7 and 8 he was at his operational headquarters in the village of Nagykovácsi some 10 miles outside Budapest, with quite a formidable unit of National Guards under his command. He writes in the study quoted earlier: "We contacted the border guard training camp situated some 4 kilometres from Nagykovácsi, but instead of cooperating with us they revealed to the Soviet Command that the Headquarters of the National Guard had been set up at Nagykovácsi." In those circumstances he took the only option open to him: he left the country on November 9 and so escaped his well-deserved punishment. Nevertheless, for some time thereafter Western radios, notably Radio Free Europe, continued to broadcast reports of how Béla Király and the force under his command continued the struggle in the hills.

From the West the defeated gangs received instructions to move into the mountainous areas and begin guerilla warfare. These champions of "liberation" believed armed struggle could continue for several months in Hungary, and that there would be long-lasting chaos.

But it was still November when their scattered and despirited followers had been forced out of the mountains by units of the reorganized Hungarian special forces enjoying the support of Soviet troops.

6.2. The International Circumstances of the Armed Suppression of the Counter-Revolution

The international situation prevailing at the time of the counter-revolution in Hungary (October and November 1956) was rather unfavourable for the forces of socialism

¹⁰⁵Budapest Military Court T. B. B. Volume 2047/1959.

and peace; international reaction was on the offensive and there was an imminent danger of war. But in the early days of November substantial newly emerging factors began to assert themselves in a way which made it possible for the progressive forces to launch their counter-attack and lay the foundations for the success of the rapid measures taken by the Soviet Union.

The most important international factor in averting the danger of war and in crushing the counter-revolution in Hungary was the firm and internationalist action taken by the Soviet Union supported by the majority of the socialist countries.

In the closing days of October 1956, the leaders of the Soviet Union made several attempts to pave the way for the normalization of the situation in Hungary. As long as some hope existed they adopted the method of demonstration and movements of military force in an effort to achieve a political solution. However, domestic counter-revolutionary forces and imperialist circles had grown over-bold and intensified their offensive. Since the methods of giving assistance adopted thus far had failed, active intervention proved to be necessary.

A statement by the government of the Soviet Union on October 30 reiterated the fundamental principles of mutual relations between the socialist countries; it listed, among others, the principle of respect for the independence and sovereignty of states. However, two days later history asked for answer to a number of questions: What sort of independence and sovereignty had to be respected? Could the Soviet Union stand by with arms at rest and watch the counter-revolutionary gangs annihilate the results of a people's efforts over a period of 12 years and nullify the achievements of socialism in Hungary? How was sovereignty to be interpreted: In a bourgeois or a proletarian manner? Independent of space and time, or on the basis of class struggle and in the context of prevailing historical conditions?

Within the environment of a strong and aggressive imperialist world system the fate of socialism in any country cannot be independent of that of the other socialist countries.

What was at stake was the independence of socialist Hungary because she was threatened by the coordinated blows of external and domestic enemies. In such circumstances the slogan of "sovereignty" was a shield for bourgeois restoration and revisionist treason. The security of workers' power had to be restored bringing with it the restoration of genuine independence and sovereignty.

Aware that there would be a lack of understanding, but motivated by the Leninist principles of proletarian internationalism, the leading organs of the Soviet Union decided to give armed assistance to the suppression of the counter-revolution. On November 4, *Pravda* defined the intentions of the Soviet Union in an editorial entitled: The Path of Reaction Must Be Blocked in Hungary! "People's Hungary is living through days of decisive importance for her future development. The question at issue was: Will Hungary continue along the path of socialist development or will the reactionary forces, which seek to restore a system that would put the country back several decades, gain the day?"

Victory for the democratic forces led by the working class can ensure actual national independence for Hungary, the complete democratic freedom of the people, cooperation with all the countries of socialism on the basis of the principles of equal rights, respect for national sovereignty and the giving of mutual fraternal assistance. Only under such conditions can People's Hungary develop her economic and cultural life at a rapid pace, raise the welfare of the people, gain adequate authority in international matters and promote the cause of the consolidation of peace."

Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic evaluated the situation in similar terms. They saw the danger from a close range and were not indifferent to what course events would take in a fraternal country and what the fate of a fraternal people would be. "It is not indifferent to us what is happening on the territory of a neighbouring country, the People's Republic of Hungary, because this country belongs to the community of socialist nations in the same way as our republic," commented *Új Szó* (New Word), the Czechoslovak daily, on October 31.

The official organs and working people of the fraternal countries looked at Hungary with profound anxiety and that is why they were in complete agreement on the need to give support and welcomed Soviet military assistance. This support, in turn, strengthened the action taken by the revolutionary Hungarian forces and aided their reorganization as well.

External and domestic reaction cherished the hope that the Soviet military action and the evaluation of the situation in Hungary would give rise to conflicts between the socialist countries. Even if the imperialists did not go as far as to dream of a break, they expected that the disruption of unity would lead to the eventual accomplishment of their objectives at a later date.

The leaders of American imperialism based their hopes above all on differences between the Soviet Union and China. On October 25, 1956, Allen Dulles reporting on the events in Hungary to the 201st session of the National Security Council of the United States gave as his opinion: "Evidently the Chinese Communists may not be all that unhappy about events in Hungary. If our assessment is correct, we may be witnessing the first rift between China and the USSR".¹⁰⁶

However, the hopes of reaction were to be dashed. In the first days of the counter-revolution there were in fact differences in how the individual socialist countries evaluated the events and their underlying reasons. This is not at all surprising because the real attitude of Imre Nagy and his followers was still to be disclosed and their slogans were still studded with socialist epithets. In the early days of November, however, the socialist countries were in complete unity on the fundamental issues and in elaborating the necessary measures.

An editorial in the November 3 issue of *Zhemin Zhibao*, the daily published by the Chinese Communist Party, came out in support of the Soviet Union: "The unity of the social-

¹⁰⁶D. D. Eisenhower: *op. cit.*, p. 67.

ist countries rallying around the Soviet Union is the most powerful bastion of peace and the progress of mankind..."

At the time of the Hungarian events international imperialism entertained high hopes of changes in Poland, too. In late October they became aware that they would not succeed in tearing Poland out of the community of socialist countries. However, they counted upon her taking a "separate" path, and on lasting differences of opinion and conflicts between Poland and the Soviet Union. They were quite certain that Poland's evaluation of the events and developments in Hungary would be quite different from that of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, and that armed struggle in Hungary would encourage reactionary elements in Poland.

On November 2 the Polish United Workers' Party issued an appeal to the Polish working class and Polish people and expressed its sincere concern over the headway made by Hungarian reaction: "The events in Hungary have entered a new and dangerous phase. It is becoming increasingly evident that reactionary elements are gaining the upper hand. The foundations of the socialist system are threatened. Chaos and anarchy are spreading throughout the whole country. Reactionary bands are lynching people and bestially murdering Communists. The Polish working class and our nation as a whole watch this turn of events with the gravest concern. We condemn the reactionary forces that are causing Hungary to drift towards disaster."

The imperialists also expected much of Yugoslavia and the stance it would take. On many occasions the Hungarian party leadership under Rákosi and Gerő committed injustices against the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. Relations with that country had been improved but in an ambiguous manner and with reservations. Accumulated mistrust of the Hungarian Party in Yugoslavia had begun to abate in the summer of 1956. A party and government delegation headed by Ernő Gerő was received by Yugoslavia from October 14 to 23. However, some Yugoslav organs and ideological circles were favourably disposed to Imre Nagy's group. They regarded Imre Nagy and his followers as

"progressives" because of their "anti-Stalinist" attitude and maintained contact with them through Yugoslav diplomats. White terror, however, shocked the Yugoslav leadership and the whole Yugoslav people. On November 4 the Yugoslav Government assured the newly established revolutionary centre of its support, agreed with the need to crush the counter-revolution, and came out in support of Soviet assistance and the action taken by the Soviet military units.¹⁰⁷

Finally, it is noteworthy and necessary to recall the position taken by Palmiro Togliatti on Soviet military assistance, published in the November 6 issue of the Italian Communist Party's daily *l'Unità*. Togliatti's support of Soviet action against the counter-revolution in Hungary was deeply sincere and inspired by profound internationalism. He formulated his views in the article entitled Defence of Freedom and Peace. "It is possible that under the impact of the unbridled propaganda of the enemy certain people tend to vacillate, show irresolution and make mistakes. Later on they will regain their certainty. It is neither unique nor novel that there are people in the working class movement who take some months or even years to arrive at an understanding of the essence of matters. Nevertheless, the essence of the events is obvious... It is the duty of the Soviet Union to prevent the development of hotbeds of military provocation along her borders. It is her duty, especially at the present moment, to defend all the positions that constitute part and parcel of the front of peace; it is her duty to prevent these positions from being broken through or to allow them to be weakened even to a minimal degree. It is her responsibility not only towards herself, towards the peoples and countries of Eastern Europe, but also towards us and all the peoples of the world."

On November 2 and 3 the leaders of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government began direct and indirect talks with the leaders of the fraternal countries.

¹⁰⁷ *Magyar Szó* (Hungarian Word). Novi Sad, November 5, 1956. Statement by the Yugoslav News Agency TANJUG on November 4.

They supported the formation of the new Government and in view of the grave situation they agreed with Soviet troops assisting the Hungarian Government to crush the counter-revolution. In reaching this position the socialist countries may have had different points of departure, but they had one thing in common: they supported the Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government and regarded the assistance given by Soviet troops as an internationalist revolutionary act. This was a serious blow that profoundly shattered the hopes of imperialism.

In November 1956, the Soviet Union had to shoulder heavy burdens on another front of the struggle for peace and progress. Parallel with the fighting in Hungary, Britain and France committed their act of aggression, the attack on Egypt. Nationalization of the Suez Canal represented a serious threat to capitalist profit, and set an encouraging example to the national liberation struggles of the colonial countries. The major imperialist powers regarded the Middle East as an important strategic area. Military bases there constituted an immediate threat to the security of the socialist countries and the peoples of the Arab countries struggling for their national independence. The drive to regain domination over the Suez Canal and to deliver a military blow that would teach Egypt a lesson reflected the common interests of imperialism. The aggression was also designed to teach a lesson to the national liberation movements in general. For similar reasons the United States Administration tacitly supported the deterring and retaliatory measures taken by Britain and France.

During the summer and autumn, while negotiations seeking a peaceful solution to the Suez Canal problem were in train both within and outside the United Nations, the British and French governments busied themselves in preparing for military action. They used Israel as a battering-ram. In September and October, Israel brought about a highly tense situation in the Middle East through a series of provocative actions against Jordan. Britain pretended to adopt retaliatory measures against Israel, but in fact France, following an agreement with Britain, delivered arms to Israel. Together,

the two governments elaborated the scenario of their subsequent military action.

On October 23 the French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau flew to London where the plans for the talks were approved. They then initiated the offensive against Egypt. On October 25, Israel ordered a general mobilization, and attacked Egypt four days later. On October 30 the British and French governments sent an ultimatum to the warring parties in "defence of unobstructed traffic along the Suez Canal". It demanded that both Israel and Egypt withdraw their troops to ten miles on either side of the waterway. This strange ultimatum would have required Egypt to withdraw her forces 100 miles from her own borders. Obviously, Egypt rejected the shameful ultimatum. On October 31, British and French troops attacked Egypt by air and sea, penetrating into the Canal zone.

The British and French aggressors expected an early success. They had carefully timed their attack. They were convinced that those allies of the national liberation movement that were ready and able to give assistance, the socialist world system, first of all the Soviet Union, would have their hands full with the events in Hungary. The coincidence of dates in the aggression and Hungarian counter-revolution bears full witness to the timing. Both actions began on October 23. On October 28, when the British tabled the so-called "Hungarian Question" at the UN Security Council, they were giving the final encouragement to Israel to launch an attack on Egypt. On October 31, as Hungarian reaction celebrated victory, aggression against Egypt was being extended by British and French imperialism.

British and French reaction had planned to bring Egypt to its knees in two or three days (October 29 to 31), calculating that by the time the progressive forces of the world had recovered, victory over Egypt would present them with a fait accompli. In the early stages US Administration circles also thought in terms of such a fait accompli, but by November 1 there had been substantial changes in the American position and the United States had taken steps designed

to bring the joint British-French-Israeli attack to a halt and exploit the situation in its own interests.

In early November, American imperialism was concerned to secure victory for reaction in Hungary. It gave that goal top priority, in the belief that its general and immediate interests would be best served first and foremost by a blow struck at socialism and a weakening of the ranks of the socialist countries. Without doubt, for the leaders of the United States the major point at issue was the struggle between socialism and capitalism. The statement made by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles at a meeting held in President Eisenhower's drawing room at 9 a. m. on November 1 met with the complete agreement of the participants, "...it is nothing less than tragic that at this very time, when we are on the point of winning an immense and long-hoped-for victory over Soviet colonialism in Eastern Europe, we should be forced to choose between following in the footsteps of Anglo-French colonialism in Asia and Africa, or splitting our course away from their course".¹⁰⁸

At that stage the leaders of the United States were already exasperated by the Anglo-French fiasco, or perhaps more accurately, by the fact that their action was dragging on too long. The Egyptian people offered heroic resistance which, in turn, rallied all the Arab peoples; several Arab countries like Syria, Jordan and Lebanon mobilized their forces to display their solidarity with Egypt in its battle against aggression. This circumstance prompted the leaders of the United States to alter direction. In a letter President Eisenhower addressed to but did not actually send to Anthony Eden, he warned the British Prime Minister that the situation was fraught with dangers to imperialism as a whole: "I must say that it is hard for me to see any good final result emerging from a scheme that seems to antagonize the entire Moslem world. Indeed I have difficulty in seeing any end whatsoever if all the Arabs should begin reacting somewhat as the North Africans have been operating against the French."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸D. D. Eisenhower: *op. cit.*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 81.

The United States Administration was especially afraid that the Arab world could be given effective assistance by the Soviet Union and that this would, in turn, considerably weaken imperialism's positions in the Middle East. President Eisenhower stated the case, "We could not permit the Soviet Union to seize leadership in the struggle against the use of force in the Middle East and thus win the confidence of the new independent nations of the world. But on the other hand I by no means wanted the British and French to be branded as unprovoked naked aggressors."¹¹⁰ These were the considerations the United States Administration had in mind, when it acted quickly to be seen as taking the initiative at the United Nations for action against the Suez aggression.

In the early hours of November 2 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the US resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire. The resolution called on the parties to stop hostilities immediately, and it provided that the aggressors should withdraw without delay behind the lines set by the 1948 Israeli-Arab truce. The Soviet Union, which sharply condemned Anglo-French and Israeli aggression, supported the resolution which was favourable to Egypt's heroic struggle. This brought about a peculiar situation in the United Nations: the Soviet Union and the United States voting together on the issue of the attack against Egypt, though on the basis of different considerations, while, at the same time, they were in sharp conflict over their evaluation of the Hungarian events and how they affected the fate of the Hungarian people.

The Anglo-French and Israeli forces ignored the United Nations resolution and the stance taken by the United States. Air raids continued over Egyptian cities, airborne troops were dropped on Port Said, and all the indications were that the aggressors intended to expand the conflict.

The Soviet Union, backed by the socialist countries, decided to take a decisive step. As Soviet troops, at the request of the Revolutionary Hungarian Workers' and Peasants'

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 83.

Government, began suppressing the counter-revolutionary armed bands in Hungary in defence of socialism on November 4, the Soviet Government sent a final warning on November 5 to the aggressors attacking Egypt. The Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, Marshall Bulganin, formulated the serious warning in a note: "The Soviet Government is determined to use force to destroy the aggressors and to restore peace in the Middle East."

On November 6, Britain and France announced that they were prepared to accept the cease-fire. Aggression not only stood exposed, it had ended in a disastrous failure.

History justified the Soviet Union, the followers of socialism and the progressive forces which were united in the struggle against imperialism in both fields.

Chapter 7

The Foundation of Socialist Consolidation

7.1. The Establishment of a New Revolutionary Centre

At 5 a. m. on November 4, 1956, it was announced in a radio broadcast that a Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government had been formed and had begun working. After turning to the Soviet Government with a request for military assistance, the new Government set about suppressing the armed counter-revolution in order to defend and consolidate people's power and create conditions for the continuation of the building of socialism. This step which determined fundamentally the national fate of the Hungarian people had been preceded by several difficult individual and collective decisions: The essence of all these decisions was the need to make a *revolutionary break*.

It was extremely difficult to assess the direction in which events were moving during the days that followed October 23, 1956. Justified expressions of indignation against the political line of the Rákosi-Gerő clique which had violated socialist and patriotic ideas, demands for restoration of the Leninist norms of party and state life, and demands at first disguised but increasingly open for the restoration of capitalism or even the exploitive system of large estates, existed side by side in a confusing complexity. As the pace of events accelerated, the essential characteristics of the counter-revolution became increasingly identifiable.

The masses were engulfed in an immense chaos. Hundreds of thousands believed that a struggle was being waged to achieve the satisfaction of their justified demands. In the early stages the counter-revolutionary forces were able to disguise their goal behind an adroit use of slogans concern-

ing the purification of socialism, socialist prosperity, a victory for national sovereignty, freedom and democracy. Their aims packaged in an impressive flood of patriotic words were studded with nationalist incitement. It is true that White Terror generated a shock, but the counter-revolutionary propaganda which exploited every possible means and at the highest possible pitch of intensity, explained that atrocities were the unfortunate but unavoidable necessities of purification.

This impossible situation paralyzed the conscious adherents of socialism; tens of thousands of Communists ready to stand their ground and fight were placed in a position of impotence. Those already fighting or ready to fight to defend workers' power were given no leadership and had no centre to direct them. On October 28 the Imre Nagy government declared that the events were of a revolutionary nature, and by implication the people struggling to defend Socialist Hungary were simultaneously branded counter-revolutionaries. The party was dissolved and only one statement was made about its reorganization.

Identifying the essence of the events was further complicated by the initial reactions within the international Communist movement and the socialist countries. Like the Hungarian events these were not unambiguous. In late October and early November, as the picture clarified, the international movement made a correct appraisal of events, but this was never made widely known in Hungary at the time.

On October 30, counter-revolutionary units of a heterogeneous composition but with a centralized objective attacked the Budapest Headquarters of the Hungarian Workers' Party at *Köztársaság tér*. A siege of several hours showed that the counter-revolutionary armed forces were at a high level of military organization: heavy weapons were used and the attack on the building was directed by a single command. After the building had been taken, 25 of the defenders were mercilessly murdered. During the defence of the building Imre Mező, Secretary of the Budapest Party Committee who enjoyed public respect and had worked hard for the actual renewal of socialism, suffered a fatal

wound. The siege was actually a signal. From then onwards, the counter-revolutionary armed bands regarded as their principal task: occupation of party offices, persecution of Communists who stood firm, and intimidation of the supporters of socialism.

The real nature of the events continued to be obscured by the fact that the country was led by a government headed by Communists. Imre Nagy, Prime Minister in a government that was reshuffled every second or third day, was known as a militant Communist of the Hungarian Communist movement for four decades, one who had taken part in the work of the Comintern. His jovial appearance, impressive Hungarian style of speaking, and earlier opposition to the harmful consequences of the personality cult combined to accord him considerable popular respect. But on October 30 he offered his hand to József Dudás, the counter-revolutionary leader who directed the attack on the Budapest Party Headquarters. He sought international guarantees for the new situation by announcing Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Treaty and declaring Hungary's permanent neutrality on October 31. He asked the capitalist big powers to guarantee the necessary conditions. By then it had become evident that to go any further along this road with Imre Nagy was to betray the ideas of socialism and contribute to the destruction of workers' power.

Even in the group around Imre Nagy increasing numbers recognized the counter-revolutionary menace. When the authoritative veteran, Zoltán Szántó, who remained alongside Nagy, asked D. Soldatić, the Ambassador to Budapest of the Yugoslav Federal People's Republic on November 2 whether they could be given asylum in the Embassy building, he said they sought asylum "from the pogrom staging counter-revolutionaries, who are raging in action at this time". He was given a positive answer on November 3.¹¹¹ One of Imre Nagy's top aides, Minister of State Géza Losonczy, who had been subjected to ill-treatment during the period of the personality cult, told journalists at a press con-

¹¹¹The Recollections of D. Soldatić. *Viesnik*, November 28, 1977.

ference in the Parliament building on November 3: "According to the opinion of the Government, the counter-revolutionary forces are rather strong in the country. The Government has declared unanimously that it will not make any concession as far as the positive achievements of the past twelve years are concerned: for example, the agrarian reform, the nationalization of factories, and social achievements... The Government is determined not to tolerate the restoration of capitalism in Hungary."¹¹²

These admissions and pledges made it even more difficult to grasp the underlying features of the situation. While they were being made, the Government's actions were leading to the stabilization of the positions of the counter-revolution and serving to defend them on the international scene. No fundamental actions were taken against the counter-revolution. These policies and actions represented the path of treason; it was necessary to break with them. At the same time, the alternative policy to be adopted in striking back at the counter-revolution could not be a return to that pursued during the cult of the personality, and those who had been associated with the cult could not be the initiators of a new revolutionary centre.

On November 1, János Kádár and Ferenc Münnich agreed that the organization of a new revolutionary centre had become a life or death issue. Late that same evening they left Budapest to set about preparing a revolutionary counter-blow. On November 2, György Marosán, Antal Apró, Károly Kiss and other comrades followed János Kádár, the arrangements having been made by Lieutenant-General Sándor Nógrádi.

Making that break and facing up to the need to combat counter-revolution took place under extremely difficult circumstances and conditions. Although only a few recognized it at the time, the development of events had exposed the bankruptcy of two well-known groups in the leadership of the Hungarian Workers' Party. The "left-wing" group, or the Rákosi clique, had brought about the crisis by their viola-

tions of the law, by arbitrary and incorrect measures, by refusal to budge from positions once adopted, and by overweening vanity and jealousy. They considered their personal power to be basic to socialism; it was in fact the very thing by which they undermined the foundations of socialism. This old guard of the Hungarian Workers' Party could not be the nucleus of a new centre; it had lost the confidence of both the party membership and the working masses, and was personally responsible for the situation that had arisen. Besides, it was incapable of developing a programme that would have offered a way forward.

The "right-wing" group led by Imre Nagy were intoxicated by the changes and by their success in seizing office. While counter-revolutionary terror raged in the streets, while forces hostile to socialism took over the institutions, while socialist patriots were persecuted, the members of this group were reduced to trailing behind the events while imagining that they directed them. They satisfied the political demands of the counter-revolution in every respect and in the period during which people's power was being destroyed, acted as if the only thing of importance was the solemn declaration of some kind of absolute national sovereignty. Meanwhile, the counter-revolutionaries who schemed their eventual ousting even as they joined them, were able to come in behind them and with their support succeeded in penetrating the positions of power and government. This allowed the hostile elements to assume a cloak of legality. The members of the group were incapable of bringing about a reversal of the trend of events; indeed they did not want one.

Those who were to initiate and carry through the revolutionary break had been in an extremely difficult position. They had observed the party rules throughout: they had not engaged in organizing activities, nor had they formed a group or faction beforehand. They knew of one another, but had not established any organized link. János Kádár told the May 11, 1957 session of Parliament: "In all honesty I have to tell you that this part of the leadership was in a state of serious confusion during those grave days. Speaking

¹¹²*Egyetemi Ifjúság* November 4, 1956.

on my own behalf, I can tell you that it was not easy to understand what was happening in the drift of the events. And it was even more difficult to foresee the next step, what should be done. So it was difficult to realize what was happening and it was difficult to see what to do. Therefore, there was uncertainty on the part of the better and honest part of the leadership."¹¹³

The onerous conditions in which the new revolutionary centre began to organize and act were further complicated by the atmosphere among the working masses. There was a great political confusion and chaos. The hope that also just demands were likely to be realized had induced a mood of intoxication, while the masses' ability to act was paralyzed by confusions and fears. The revolutionary centre established under the leadership of János Kádár faced a difficult choice of priorities for action; whether to begin with the recognition of the just demands of the working class and then meet the challenge of the counter-revolution gradually, or to concentrate all its forces exclusively on crushing the counter-revolution even if that first step, certain to be misunderstood in the initial stages, would encounter a lack of understanding on the part of the misled people, and then, as a second step, to embark upon satisfying the just demands of the working class under conditions of consolidation? Starting out from the fact that the situation that had developed in Hungary threatened the very foundations of socialism and taking into consideration the experience of the international working class movement, the decision was taken to smash the counter-revolution as the first step. Without its suppression no just desire or demand of the working class and the working people could be met.

From the events and decisions of that entire period important conclusions of principle could be drawn. The Marxist-Leninist vanguard must always set out from the fundamental interests of the workers, the working people and must always take into account the position of the masses,

¹¹³J. Kádár: *Selected Speeches and Interviews*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest 1985, p. 183.

the extent of their preparedness, their readiness to act, the degree of organization, the political atmosphere, and other relevant factors. The situation becomes extremely difficult when a contradiction arises between the long-term interests of the working masses and their momentary mood. In October and November 1956, the mood of the masses inflamed by the nationalist incitement of the counter-revolution and the demagoguery of revisionism, ran counter to the lasting interests of the country and the working people. It is the historic merit of the revolutionary centre led by János Kádár that it grasped the essence of the situation and had the courage to combat all types of hostile propaganda. By its activities, the centre served the lasting and fundamental national and class interests of the Hungarian people. The new revolutionary centre was confident that the major results of the building of socialism, the twelve years of People's Hungary had had a lasting influence on the working masses. This point was discussed by János Kádár when he addressed the Tenth Plenary Session of the Central Council of Hungarian Trade Unions on January 26, 1957: "When on November 3, 1956 we were thinking of forming the present government, believe me, I knew only too well that we were not going to be welcomed with bouquets of flowers. I was well aware what we would have to face but I was convinced that truth was on our side and that the people would understand our action, would approve and appreciate that we were coming out in opposition to the counter-revolutionary flood, and that we were saving the Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat."¹¹⁴ That same thought was underlined at the Parliamentary session referred to earlier: "And I was also certain, although the situation looked different at the time, that the vast masses of the Hungarian people would understand that we had to make a break and we had to take the road of open struggle."¹¹⁵

The revolutionary centre led by János Kádár formed the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Govern-

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 183.

ment in Szolnok on November 3. Not every member of the Government was present in the town but they were as one in their determination. Four signed the Open Letter to the Hungarian Working People! It began like this: "We the signatories, Antal Apró, János Kádár, István Kossa and Ferenc Münnich, Ministers, former members of the Imre Nagy Government, announce that on November 1, 1956 we severed all relations with that Government, left it and took the initiative to form the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government."¹¹⁶

The composition and goals of the Government were presented in another document: An Appeal to the Hungarian People! The composition of the Government was as follows: János Kádár, Prime Minister; Dr. Ferenc Münnich, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Armed Forces and Public Security; György Marosán, Minister of State; Imre Horváth, Foreign Minister; István Kossa, Minister of Finance; Antal Apró, Minister of Industry; Imre Dögei, Minister of Agriculture; Sándor Rónai, Minister of Commerce.¹¹⁷

János Kádár and Ferenc Münnich, working from the Army Barracks in *Vörös Hadsereg útja* (Red Army Road), Szolnok, with the assistance of the Command of the Soviet troops, planned and guided the military operations to shatter the armed counter-revolutionary bands. Ferenc Münnich was assigned the role of ensuring that the units of the Hungarian People's Army that remained intact would understand the new situation and support the operations of the Soviet forces.

Antal Apró and György Marosán, operating from Szolnok Municipal Council Building (1, Lajos Kossuth Street), organized the civilian side of the Government's activities and established contact with public figures backing the taking of revolutionary action. Károly Kiss was assigned the duty of preparing the organizational steps towards the launching of a new party. They were assisted by Sándor Nógrádi

¹¹⁶*Szabad Nép*, November 6, 1956.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*

and other comrades. Ferenc Simon was responsible for the broadcasts from Radio Szolnok, Károly Erdélyi was attached to János Kádár. Foreign Minister Imre Horváth, unable to go to Budapest from Vienna, went to Prague to begin the foreign affairs activities of the new Government there, working to achieve diplomatic recognition internationally, and supplying accurate information to the United Nations. The other Ministers were active in preparatory work in Budapest. A group of officers in the Ministry of Defence, under the leadership of Lieutenant-General Gyula Uszta supported the military actions of the new revolutionary centre on November 4.

The new revolutionary centre regarded Szolnok as its provisional headquarters, as János Kádár explained on November 4 when he addressed a meeting of the party activists of the town. It took place around 5 p. m. in the building of the town Party Committee (22, *Beloianis utca*) and was attended by some 25 to 30 persons. Informing the meeting about the situation, the formation of the new Government and its goals, János Kádár with what seemed extraordinary optimism at the time discussed the possibilities of a successful way out. It was characteristic of the comradely atmosphere and mood of the meeting that quite a few of the host of questions put by the participants concerned the ill-treatment János Kádár had been subjected to during the years he spent in prison in the early 1950s. He replied to them frankly emphasizing that even individual grievances could only be redressed by the restoration of socialist law and order.¹¹⁸

The constitutional legality of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government which included

¹¹⁸The author of this book collected information and data in 1971 and 1972 from the persons active in connection with the formation of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government. Thus he is in the possession of the statements made by Katalin Demcsák, István Feleki, Mihály Fodor, László Hudák, István Kálmán, Ferenc Simon, József Szabó, László Szekeres. Károly Szepesi, Mrs. Károly Szepesi, Viktória Varga and other comrades and their personal experiences about their activities at that time.

the Speaker of Parliament was soundly based. The formation of the new Government and its composition were approved by the President of the Presidential Council, István Dobi, who had approved of the break with the Nagy Government. The new Government was sworn in on November 7 in the Parliament building in the presence of István Dobi.

7.2. International Assistance and the Role of the Domestic Forces

At the time of its formation, the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government was given broad international support. Simultaneously with the last days of the counter-revolution, a large Chinese delegation headed by Liu Shao-ch'i was in Moscow and along with the Soviet leaders took "close" stock of the situation. On November 1, Khrushchev, Molotov and Malenkov, the then leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, held consultations with Polish leaders on the Soviet-Polish border. From there, Khrushchev and Malenkov went on to have talks with the Romanian, Czechoslovak and Bulgarian leaders on November 2 about the situation and what measures had to be taken. On the evening of the same day they arrived at the Isle of Brioni in Yugoslavia, and immediately entered into a wide-ranging exchange of views with Yugoslav leaders Tito, Kardelj and Rankovich which lasted until the morning of November 3.

Differing views and concepts were voiced during these consultations but there was an identity of opinion concerning the fundamental issues. It was established that counter-revolution, which had gained ground in Hungary, determined to destroy the working people's socialist achievements, had created a hotbed of war right in the middle of Europe and constituted a serious threat to the security of the socialist countries and European peace. Under these circumstances, the parties involved agreed that defeat of the counter-revolution in Hungary was not simply a Hungarian

matter but one of common internationalist interest and a demand of international importance. On learning that a new revolutionary centre had been established with the object of restoring socialist law and order, the leaders of the socialist countries made clear unanimously that they were ready to give every assistance to it in performing its duties. It was also agreed that in case the new Revolutionary Government would request armed assistance for crushing the counter-revolutionary groups, that request would be met by the armed forces of the Soviet Union. The possibility of Romanian and Czechoslovak participation had also arisen but was ruled out on historical grounds.

In the opinion of the revolutionary centre led by János Kádár, "the first unavoidable step in the interest of the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat is to crush the armed groups of the counter-revolution. Therefore all the other tasks are subordinated to this primary duty".¹¹⁹ The Soviet Union responded to the new Government's request for assistance and the armed counter-attack was launched at 4 a. m. on November 4. The armed suppression of the counter-revolution had virtually been effected by November 9, but its destructive influence continued for a time.

The revolutionary centre headed by János Kádár knew only too well that the crushing of the counter-revolution by arms was no more than a startingpoint, and that the accomplishment of the immense tasks constituting the essence of socialist consolidation depended on the activities of the Hungarian revolutionary forces. (There are always deeplying internal reasons behind every major social trend.) It is true that external forces can exert an influence on the intensity and the direction, but it is the internal causes and forces that play the decisive role. For this reason, the decisions made and the positions taken by the revolutionary centre became the decisive factors of further progress.

External assistance can play only a specific and limited role. It crushed the armed counter-revolutionary gangs in

¹¹⁹J. Kádár: *A szocializmus teljes győzelméért* (For the Complete Victory of Socialism). Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1962, p. 49.

Hungary in 1956, ended the raging white terror and prevented the continuation of international imperialist intervention. At the same time, it also represented great moral and political support for the adherents of socialism; it gave them a breathing space, creating conditions in which they could regroup their forces and launch their counter-attack in the political, economic and ideological fields.

It is the internal forces that play the decisive role in the socio-political events in any country. Reconstruction of the political super-structure cannot be directed by foreign military personnel. Reconstruction of this kind can be attempted, but can be effective only over a limited period; the strength of socialist society is built upon and reinforced by the basic classes of a nation. Overcoming economic difficulties is primarily dependent on the level of national production. The land of a country can only be cultivated by its peasantry. The continuous production in a nation's factories depends on its own workers and technical intelligentsia. Chaos and ideological confusion in a society cannot be overcome by arms; it can only be surmounted in an ideological and political struggle, through debates and through persevering educational and ideological work.

All this was clearly recognized by the revolutionary centre led by János Kádár and it acted accordingly.

In addition to crushing the armed counter-revolutionary gangs, the regrouping of Communists and the reorganization of the party were the other major tasks. Already on November 6, the revolutionary centre, expanded by new personalities and active as the Provisional Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, issued an appeal concerning the reorganization of the party: "Our much-suffered party of a glorious past is living through the most difficult period of its history. The situation demands concentration of all forces of the party because only in this way can we successfully face counter-revolutionary attacks aimed at the restoration of capitalism and defend the power of the people. This is the only way in which we can ensure the development of democratism for the Hungarian working class, working peasants and the progressive intellectuals

over the broadest possible range, secure our national independence and sovereignty and achieve the victory of the socialist order!" In its subsequent parts his appeal to the Hungarian Communists, basing itself on "principled struggle on two fronts", dissociated the new party from the "harmful policy pursued by the Rákosi clique" and the group led by Imre Nagy and Géza Losonczy, which "had taken a basically nationalist and chauvinist stand" and "opened the way for the counter-revolutionary forces". In connection with this, the appeal emphasized: "To make clear the resolute nature of the break with the errors of the past in this manner too, we decided that the name of the party will be changed and we shall assume the new name of Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party". While the appeal did not attempt to embellish the situation, it did voice optimism as to the future: "The situation is grave. But if we join forces and end the disarray in our ranks, we shall have sufficient strength! Our party is invincible if it stands by its principles and if it relies on the working class, on the broad masses of our working people for support. Comrades! To work, to struggle!"¹²⁰

In the wake of this appeal, reorganization of the party organizations began in earnest. Veteran party members, people who had known persecution and intimidation, Communists true to principle took the initiative in establishing party organizations. By the end of November 1956, there were 1,980 active branches, and the number was rising steadily day after day. Meanwhile the revolutionary centre was expanded: the Provisional Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party had been formed and held its first meeting on November 11. The fundamental conclusions drawn by the Central Committee were discussed by János Kádár in a radio address on the same day.

Following the clear positions taken by the Central Committee and in the wake of its work, party organizations were established in increasing numbers, and the number of Communists ready to struggle also grew. The records show party

¹²⁰Népszabadság, November 8, 1956.

membership at some 102,000 on December 30, 1956.¹²¹ In fact many more people stood actively in favour of socialist consolidation shoulder to shoulder with the party's leadership.

From the moment it was established the revolutionary centre aimed at organizing and reorganizing the armed forces of workers' and peasants' power. Work in this direction began as early as on November 4. The first step was to ensure that the army remained neutral on November 4 when the counter-attack was launched. At dawn on November 4, Ferenc Münnich issued his first order to the armed forces, "I herewith order the units of the Hungarian People's Army not to fire on Soviet troops. They should send negotiators to receive the arriving troops." The appeal was understood by the officers loyal to workers' power and there were no serious or tragic confrontations in any village or town. In most places, the units of the Hungarian Army assisted the Soviet troops in restoring order.

It was the duty of the Hungarian armed forces to guarantee the security of the new Government. At dawn on November 4, Major László Hudák, commander of the counter intelligence department of the Kilián Air Force Officers' School, asked Lieutenant-Colonel József Szabó, regimental commander of the School to organize the security of the building of the Szolnok County Council which was the seat of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government. The armed guard was recruited on November 4 from the students of the Officers' School and was later reinforced from units of the Anti-Aircraft Artillery Warrant Officers' School which were under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Béla Kaszás. In addition to the County Council building, military units also guarded the bridges, major roads and highways, occupied the Post Office building, the bank and the railway station and ensured the operation of the radio in the city of Szolnok. In performing

¹²¹ *Legyőzhetetlen erő. A magyar kommunista mozgalom fejlődésének 50 éve* (Invincible Force. Fifty Years of the Hungarian Communist Movement). Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1968, pp. 235-236.

these duties they had the full support of the Soviet Command.

As from November 8, definite measures were taken to organize the armed forces of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government. On November 8, the Government issued a statement on the formation of the special (militia) forces. On November 10, Lieutenant-General Ferenc Münnich, Minister of the Armed Forces, instructed army officers to take a clear-cut position, i. e., to undertake the task of restoring order or to apply for their discharge. Following these firm measures the organization of the armed forces of the new Government began at a rapid pace.

Budapest took the lead. The first special forces units were organized in the capital. The 1st Revolutionary Regiment of Army Officers was established overnight, from the evening of November 9 to the morning of November 10, at the Sport Officers' School in *Dózsa György út*. The regiment was recruited from the officers of the 5th Motorized Division of Kecskemét, former partisans and employees of the Ministry of the Interior. Its strength stood at 1,170 on November 20. The 2nd Revolutionary Special Forces Regiment was established from November 13 to 16, at the Miklós Zrínyi Military Academy. It was recruited from the cadets and officer-instructors of the Academy. The regiment had a strength of 1,200, mustered in 10 companies. Organization of the 3rd Revolutionary Special Forces regiment began on November 10 in the Petőfi Barracks in Buda. The initial 400 volunteers were soon increased to 1,050. By early December, a Special Forces Police Regiment had also been established.

In response to the appeal of the new Government special forces units were established at a rapid rate at the county seats as well. For example, the special forces in Bács County, established at the middle of November with a strength of 80, had reached the 1,000 mark by the end of the month. In the city of Győr organization of the special forces began on November 10. The initial strength of 125 was close to 1,000 by mid-December. In Heves County contacts were made with Soviet troops as early as on November 3 and at

mid-November six special forces units corresponding to the six districts in the county were operating. A company of special forces, initially 70 strong, was established in the city of Veszprém on November 13. The strength was soon over 200.¹²² Data of this kind would make up a fairly long list. Let us mention only one important figure: by early 1957 the total strength of the revolutionary special forces was close to 18,000.¹²³

The Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government set about reorganizing the organs of state administration as early as its meeting on November 7. The counter-revolutionaries endeavoured to eliminate local councils and to replace them by disguised counter-revolutionary institutions: "revolutionary" or "national" committees. In several counties, on receiving the news about the formation of the new government, local council people loyal to people's power immediately began to form workers' and peasants' revolutionary committees or councils. The new government did not want to establish new organs of local administration and so it declared in its statement of November 7 that "...the lawful state executive organs are everywhere the executive committees of the local councils".¹²⁴ The work of the local councils was also reorganized very rapidly throughout the whole of Hungary.

Experience and many practical examples of socialist consolidation showed that the resort to external assistance did not diminish but rather enhanced the crucial role and influence of the Hungarian revolutionary forces. Responsibility had to be borne by the domestic revolutionary centre. This

¹²² Archives of the Ministry of Defence, Materials on 1956, Fascicle 10, p. 540.

¹²³ Á. Szabó: *A Magyar Forradalmi Honvéd Karhatalom* (The Hungarian Revolutionary Honvéd Special Forces from November 1956 to June 1957). Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, Budapest 1976, p. 51. and p. 54.

¹²⁴ *A magyar forradalmi munkásmozgalom története* (History of the Hungarian Revolutionary Working-Class Movement). Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1976, p. 586.

centre not only undertook but worked very actively on the task of carrying through revolutionary polarization and the organization of the domestic forces of socialist consolidation.

7.3. Shoulder to Shoulder with the Working Masses for Socialist Consolidation

In his radio address to the nation on November 11, János Kádár stated: "I can announce that the overt attack launched on the People's Republic of Hungary has been defeated in the entire territory of the country, in the capital city and in the provinces."¹²⁵ This meant that winning over the working masses, eliminating the consequences and impact of the counter-revolution and the resumption of production became the principal areas of the political struggle.

The counter-revolutionary forces adopted the tactic of concealing themselves behind the endeavours and demands of the working masses, seeking to disguise their real goals behind socialist and democratic slogans. They attempted to give the impression of acting for the achievement of the most important endeavours of the Hungarian people. Following the crushing of the armed groups, the principal tasks were to effect a sharp delineation between the movement of the masses and the goals and actions of the counter-revolution. The new government had to meet the justified demands and expectations of the working people and to end once and for all the destruction committed by the counter-revolution. To achieve the above objectives, it was essential to formulate the political and ideological position of the party clearly.

An unambiguous statement of party policy was formulated in the appeal issued on November 6 by the Provisional

¹²⁵ *A Magyar Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt Kormány közérdekű rendeletei és nyilatkozatai* (Decrees and Statements of Public Interest by the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government). Budapest 1956, p. 4.

Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party: "The forces of counter-revolution exploited the justified mass dissatisfaction which, while it stemmed from the errors of the past, had by no means been directed against people's power." The Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government took a firm stand against these forces when it inscribed on its banner "the defence of our People's Democratic system, suppression of the counter-revolution and a guarantee of the peaceful work and welfare of the working people". The programme called for the resolute defence of the results and successes achieved in the course of twelve years of revolutionary change. At the same time, it admitted that during the previous years grave errors had been made and illegalities committed. That is why the document made it clear that "to restore our Party's strength and to enable it to lead the masses, we must definitively break with the harmful policies and criminal methods adopted by the Rákosi clique which shook the confidence of broad working masses in our party and undermined the very foundations of its strength". The appeal also firmly condemned treason in spite of the fact that this was unintelligible to a part of the masses: "A definite break has to be made also with the Imre Nagy-Losonczy group which, surrendering the positions of the working class and people's power, and adopting a nationalist-chauvinistic stand, opened the way to the counter-revolutionary forces and in so doing actually betrayed the cause of socialism."¹²⁶ The simultaneous struggle on two fronts became the cornerstone of all the activities of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

This position was consistently formulated in every important document issued by the Government. The declaration of loyalty officers were required to take also recorded such an analysis of the situation. Those in the armed services who wanted to serve the people and defend socialism signed without reservation. "A large-scale patriotic movement has been launched in this country for broadening socialist democracy, for correcting the grave mistakes committed by

¹²⁶*Népszabadság*, November 8, 1956.

the Rákosi-Gerő clique and for ensuring national independence and sovereignty. I acknowledge that these demands are justified and I personally support them. At the same time, I deeply condemn all forms of counter-revolution, brutal white terror, attempts at capitalist restoration, and the subversive activities of capitalist circles against our people's power. I am prepared to fight these endeavours with all my strength."¹²⁷

It was necessary to reiterate and make this position of principle public again because the overwhelming majority of Communists displayed an attitude of "one-sided sensitivity", in other words, they tended to lay emphasis either on the errors and crimes of the Rákosi period or only on counter-revolutionary actions and revisionist treason. At the same time, in their rearguard struggle the forces of counter-revolution continued to rely on the fears and confusion among the working masses.

Socialist consolidation was hampered by the fact that, simultaneously with the provocations of the remnants of the armed counter-revolutionary forces, attempts were made to continue the organized activities of the revisionist circles. On November 14 the delegates of the workers' councils of some 20 to 25 Budapest factories and the representatives of the revisionist nationalist groups of intellectuals established what they called the Central Workers' Council of Greater Budapest. The Council dedicated itself to preventing the resumption of continuous production. To this end, it called strikes, agitated against the Government and the special forces and hampered the restoration of law and order. The Government began talks with the Council but refused to satisfy counter-revolutionary demands and exposed them in public. The right-wing intensified its misleading activities. Simultaneously, the counter-revolutionary elements took provocative actions designed to intimidate people. They issued a call for a 48-hour strike on November 22 and 23. But their influence was declining and in an attempt to reverse this trend they called for a women's demonstration in Budapest on

¹²⁷Á. Szabó: *op. cit.*, p. 172.

December 4, organized an armed provocation in Salgótarján on November 8, and later in the mining town of Tatabánya, Békéscsaba, Miskolc, Battonya and elsewhere.

The Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government, however, refused to be forced into abandoning the policy of simultaneous political struggle on two fronts. The response to counter-revolutionary provocations was firm. The Government outlawed the Central Workers' Council, crushed the centres of armed provocation, dissolved the so-called revolutionary committees and other organizations bearing similar names. The Presidential Council adopted a decree on summary jurisdiction concerning all cases of "murder, wilful manslaughter, arson, robbery, looting or crimes of the deliberate destruction of factories of common interest or those serving the supply of the community".¹²⁸

In a radio address on November 26, János Kádár mentioned that "in recent years the demand for 'life without fear' has often been voiced. We wish and we work for law and order to be restored at the earliest possible date in the whole country and in every field of life".¹²⁹ To secure life without fear, the Government reassured misguided citizens by declaring an amnesty to cover honest Hungarian citizens who had left the country during the events and imposed well-deserved punishment on the perpetrators of white terror and their accomplices.

Bourgeois and emigré propaganda created a tremendous commotion over the introduction of summary jurisdiction broadcasting far and wide false reports about thousands of executions. Reality, however, was, as in so many other cases, very different from the slanders spread by reaction. Between November 4, 1956 and July 31, 1957, sentences were passed on 28,601 persons for having committed crimes

¹²⁸ *A Magyar Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt Kormány közérdekű rendeletei és nyilatkozatai* (Decrees and Statements of Public Interest by the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government). Vol. 2, Budapest 1956. pp. 21–22. and pp. 26–27.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

against society or public order; 6,321 were convicted for crimes against the People's Republic (for political crimes). Of the 6,321 found guilty, capital punishment was imposed on 70, 2,332 were sentenced to prison terms of over one year, and another 3,581 to imprisonment of less than one year. The remainder were either fined, sent for corrective instruction or given suspended sentences.

Instead of large-scale retaliation the party and Government adopted an open policy: a programme of mass ideological and political education. This approach, enunciated by János Kádár in his radio address on November 11, became a fundamental tenet of the policy of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party: "We know that there are innumerable questions to be settled in this country and that they cannot be solved overnight. For this reason, we decided to reveal sincerely that we do not as yet have the strength and possibility to resolve this or that question. In our view, we do not accept responsible posts in the present difficult situation in order to say nice things but to tell the people the truth and to act in their interest." Pursuing an open policy and speaking frankly constitute the fundamental means of building confidence between the party and the masses; it is the cornerstone and decisive factor of the ideological policy of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

The Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government gave ample practical proof of its consistent endeavour to meet the workers' justified interests in harmony with the possibilities at its disposal. Words and deeds were a matching unity for the new revolutionary centre. A Government decree adopted on November 10 provided for the abolition of the tax on childless couples, and 8 to 10 per cent increase of wages in industry, a State undertaking to meet the cost of restoring buildings damaged during the fighting, re-institution of the title of Doctor, and a review of the unlawful withdrawal of old-age pensions. A new agricultural policy announced on November 27 ended all compulsory deliveries of agricultural produce, ended the unjust and compulsory regrouping of farm land into larger units, condemned the violations of the voluntary principle of cooperative

farming and guaranteed large-scale assistance to both collective and individual farming serving the increase of agricultural output.

As a result of the political work of party organizations growing daily in strength and the practical measures taken by the Revolutionary Government, political tension was gradually easing and the participation of the masses in socialist consolidation started to unfold. On December 6 the party organizations held workers' mass rallies in several districts of Budapest, and these turned into a march through the streets by several thousand people demonstrating in support for workers' power, the building of socialism and the Government led by János Kádár. The counter-revolutionary snipers felt that even "the streets" were coming under the influence of the socialist forces and attempted to stage bloody provocations in order to halt this trend. In the vicinity of Budapest's Western railway station they fired on the demonstrators, killing a woman worker and wounding a member of the voluntary militia. The workers replied in a series of rallies and demonstrations in Budapest and several provincial towns. The special forces took even firmer action to crack down on those who continued to provoke violence.

The strength and degree of consolidation were measured by the resumption of continuous production. Following the partial failure of the general strike called on December 11 and 12, the mood of the workers underwent a rapid change. A growing number of workers took an increasingly firm stand against those who sought to provoke disruption and in support of ensuring the conditions for work and production. The question of the continuity of the energy supply emerged as a vital issue. In connection with this, it is quite characteristic that while on December 12 only 8,000 tons of coal were produced, by December 21 the total tonnage had risen to 29,000. By the end of 1956, the conditions in industry made it possible to start the economic plan for the coming year; the foundations of continuous production had been laid.

The measures taken by the Government in the provinces bore fruit at an even faster pace. In his radio address of No-

vember 26, János Kádár said: "Special credit must be given to those at work in rural Hungary. The employees of the state farms, the members of the cooperative farms as well as the individual farmers have done their duty honestly to the country. They worked diligently even during the period of the nationwide storm. It must be stated that without any central guidance they have completed 80 to 90 per cent of the autumn ploughing and sowing and are working industriously even now."¹³⁰ By ensuring the food supply for the coming year, the continuity of agricultural production was a considerable factor of social consolidation and progress.

The process of clarification was much slower in the cultural field among the strata of the intellectuals. First of all the Association of Hungarian Writers, and then to some extent the Association of Hungarian Journalists became centres of the hostile activities carried on by right-wing revisionist elements. In these Associations hostile groups formulated appeals and prepared leaflets inciting people to continue to fight and advocating work stoppages, so that the spirit of hostile resistance be kept alive. This situation intensified and added confusion to the debate that had begun among party members and throughout society as a whole on a number of fundamentally important questions.

The party membership wanted to be clear about the underlying reasons for the events and the persons who could be held responsible. In this respect there were many one-sided conclusions. One view placed the blame for all that had happened on the policy pursued by Rákosi and his group. Another view blamed only Imre Nagy. The belief that the university students were responsible for triggering off the fighting was voiced ever more frequently. It was also said that intellectuals are to be blamed for the ideological and intellectual disintegration. There were also people who believed that the entire Hungarian youth had been responsible.

¹³⁰A Magyar Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt Kormány közérdekű rendeletei és nyilatkozatai (Decrees and Statements of Public Interest by the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government). Vol. 2, Budapest 1956, pp. 53-54.

The fact that the events as a whole were defined as counter-revolutionary aroused heated public controversy. Masses of people who had been caught up in or drifted along with events in one way or another rejected the statement that they were counter-revolutionaries since they had started out from a desire to see the purification of socialism. In that situation a new document issued by the party was to have immense influence and bring about a major development.

The Provisional Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party met for the first time from December 2 to 5. There was an open, many-sided and sincere debate on the evaluation of the situation and on the tasks ahead. Of the 23 members of the Central Committee 21 spoke in the debate, some spoke several times.

The thorough analysis made by the Central Committee ended with the adoption of a resolution which remains valid to the present day: it laid the long-term foundations of the open and frank political style of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. The resolution described the events in the totality—in view of the fact that armed struggle and revisionist treason had been directed against people's power—as a counter-revolution. But the young people, the majority of whom had participated in the demonstration of October 23 with the intention of achieving socialist renewal were not classified as counter-revolutionaries. Discussing the movements and actions of the working masses, the resolution stated: "The sectarian policy pursued by the old party leadership had brought about a broad, democratic opposition movement in the period that followed the summer of 1953, first of all, within the party and then in the ranks of the working people under the leadership of the best of the Communists. Profoundly embittered and disappointed Communists and non-party democratic masses struggled to remedy the grave errors but remained faithful to the ideas of Communism, the socialist system, the People's Republic of Hungary."

The resolution was of historical significance. With scientific accuracy it identified the factors that "exerting their influence simultaneously, alongside one another, inter-

linked, and interrelated, had combined to lead to a tragic turn in the events".

"1. From the end of 1948, the Rákosi-Gerő clique, which had a decisive influence in the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Workers' Party and in the Government of the People's Republic of Hungary, deviated from the fundamental principles of Marxims-Leninism.

2. The oppositional wing of the party, formed in earlier years and growing steadily, which rallied around Imre Nagy and Géza Losonczy as its leaders, played a major role in causing the October events and in the tragic outcome.

3. The Horthy-fascist and Hungarian capitalist-land-owner counter-revolution, which had considerable forces operating illegally at home, while its main force assembled and organized in West Germany, was a fundamental factor in the preparation and precipitation of the October events.

4. Finally, international imperialism whose objectives obviously extended far beyond the Hungarian question, played a decisive and fundamental role in the events."

Following the clarification of the essential questions of the situation, the Provisional Central Committee also set out the major tasks. So far as the tasks ahead of the Communists were concerned, patient educational work was specified as an issue of primary importance. "The Communists must mobilize all the honest working people to defend the trade-unions, the traditional organs safeguarding the interests of the working class." It also decided to "elaborate at the earliest possible date an economic policy corresponding to the new situation with the inclusion of the competent state organs and leading economic experts". Besides, it proposed measures to strengthen the organs of state administration, to ensure the development of science and it indicated the need for organizing a workers' militia.

The Provisional Central Committee confirmed that "it is the proletarian internationalist position of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party that close friendship with the Soviet Union and the countries of the People's Democracy constitute the basis of our foreign policy according to the prin-

ciples of complete national independence, self-determination and sovereignty".¹³¹

The December resolution of the Central Committee accelerated the process of socialist consolidation because it gave a clear evaluation of the situation, determined the most important tasks and rallied the Communists and patriots ready for united action for socialism. This was shown by the domestic events and developments in the first half of 1957.

¹³¹*A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai* (Resolutions and Documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, 1956–1962). Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1964, pp. 13–24.